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# Locks, Bolts, and Bars

STORIES OF PRISONERS  
IN THE FRENCH WARS, 1759-1814

COLLECTED BY  
Mrs Oliver Elton

*ILLUSTRATED*

LONDON  
Frederick Muller Ltd.  
29 GREAT JAMES STREET  
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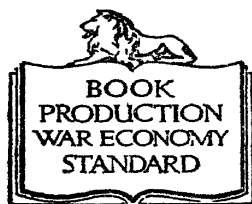


FIRST PUBLISHED BY FREDERICK MULLER LTD.

IN 1945

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY

J. AND J. GRAY, EDINBURGH



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## PREFACE

This book is dedicated to Oliver Elton.

THE narratives are given as far as possible in the words of the writers. As I have found while collecting them in the course of many busy years, the original publications are often very difficult to obtain; and latterly circumstances have prevented me from working in public libraries. It was not until 1939 that a copy of Mr. Edward Fraser's *Napoleon the Gaoler*—a survey of the field, now out of print, by an expert—came into my hands. It embodies many of the narratives, such as those of Mr. Wolfe, Captain Brenton, Lord Blayney, Captain Boys and Lieut. Ashworth, which I had been studying. I wrote to Mr. Fraser and received a gracious and generous reply permitting me to quote from his book and offering to lend me any other works in his possession which I could not procure. I am most grateful to him, and also thank his publishers, Messrs. Methuen & Co., for leave to quote a few passages from *Napoleon the Gaoler*: these are acknowledged in the footnotes. My thanks are due to Messrs Duckworth & Co. for a similar privilege.

I also sincerely thank the following: Mr. Duncan J. Sloss, C.B.E., Vice-Chancellor of Hong-Kong University, and now, alas, a prisoner in enemy hands; Mr. J. Compton, Director of Education at Ealing, for much help; Mr. J. F. Smith, Librarian of the Public Library in Liverpool, for advice and research and for the gift of a photograph; various friends, for the loan and gift of books; and Mrs. J. T. McLean, and Mrs. Phoebe Jackson, for expert secretarial and other aid.

I trust that readers who cannot get the original, or the

re-published, volumes may welcome these stories. There are many more, which war-time restrictions have prevented me from using.

L. M. ELTON.

29 WOODSTOCK ROAD,  
OXFORD.

## PROLOGUE

### LETTER FROM A SCOTS SAILOR TO HIS WIFE IN LEITH<sup>1</sup>

DEAR JENNY,

This is to let you know that I am well, in a dungeon in Dunkirk, God be blessed for it, hoping to hear the same from you and all friends.

Tell Mrs. Hodge I bought her stuffing, but it is gane; tell Jane I bought her gown, and it is gane too; I bought an anker of brandy and gin to ourselves, but, Jenny, that is gane, and a's gane; for the French dogs unriggered me in an instant, and left me nought but a greasy jacket of of their ain. But, Jenny, I have my pay from the King of England, God bless him; and have bread and water from the French Emperor, God curse him! Out of my pay, I have saved as meikle as bought me a knife, a fork, and a wee coggie.

Jenny, keep a good heart; for I'll get out of this net, and win meikle good siller, and get a bottom of my ain too; and then have at the French dogs.

I am, etc.

<sup>1</sup> From *Naval Chronicle*, vol. 29, 1813, pps. 279-280.

## CHAPTER I

### A NOTE ON THE PRISONS

THE grim conditions of all prison life during this period should be realised before reading the following narratives. It was not until about 1774 that a certain "thin, spare man, with an expressive eye and a determined look" began his extensive visitations to prisons in Great Britain and Ireland and in many European countries. This was an Englishman, John Howard, High Sheriff of Bedfordshire. In his dedication of himself in 1770, he wrote:

"Thus, O my God, have I presumed, though only a worm of the earth, with humble boldness to enter into a covenant with Thee!"<sup>1</sup>

When asked what precautions he used against infection from gaol fever and confluent smallpox in his prison visitations throughout England and Wales, he writes: "I guarded myself with smelling to vinegar, while I was in those places, and changing my apparel afterwards. . . . My reader will judge of its [the air's] malignity when I assure him that my cloaths were in my first journeys so offensive, that in a post chaise I could not bear the windows drawn up: and was therefore obliged to travel on horseback. The leaves of my memorandum book were often so tainted, that I could not use it till after spreading it an hour or two before the fire . . . next to the *free goodness and mercy* of the Author of my being, temperance and cleanliness are my preservatives. Trusting in *Divine Providence*, believing myself in the way of my duty, I visit the noxious cells, and while thus employed, 'I fear no

<sup>1</sup> John Howard, LL.D., F.R.S., *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*, 2 vols. (4th edition), 1792. Warrington. Vol. I, p. 5.



evil. . . .’ I never enter an hospital or prison before breakfast, and in an offensive room I seldom draw my breath deeply. . . . One cause why the rooms in some prisons are so close, is perhaps the window tax, which the gaolers have to pay; this tempts them to stop the windows, and stifle their prisoners. . . .”<sup>1</sup> (The window-tax operated from 1697 to 1851.)

Such were the pestilential prison airs before some of the more obvious reforms were enacted by Parliament in 1774 owing to the urgent and practical representations of John Howard, James Neild, and other expert witnesses. John Howard shewed tact and pity, yet was without sentimentality; and in spite of the relentless nature of his reports during his repeated pilgrimages through prisons at home and abroad, he appears to have made no enemies there. He himself had been captured by the French in 1756 while a passenger on the Lisbon packet *Hanover*.

It should be remembered that many of the stalwart race of seamen who fought in those long wars were born and bred in bitterly poor conditions. They were also familiar, while serving in the Navy and in merchant ships, with hardship, hunger and severe punishments; so that a seaman acclimatized to the foul air, vermin and varying rations on crowded ships could manage to endure the conditions in some French dungeons, provided that he got (as he did at Bitch), daily bread, some coarse meat, strong spirits, firing and tobacco. The sorrows of captivity and loss of sea air were a very different matter.

All prisoners suffered more or less from lack of food and clothing, and they were often in the power of extortionate and corrupt contractors, or at the mercy of famine prices owing to the prolonged wars. It was difficult also to adjust their national diets; a Frenchman craved for good soup, light bread, thin wine, cider or spirits, whilst an

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Tayler, *Memoirs of John Howard, Esq., F.R.S.*, 1836.

Englishman missed his beef or bacon and cabbage, his strong mouse-trap cheese and mug of beer or his grog. It is not easy to imagine what a Spanish prisoner did with his ration of boiled beef, cabbage, bread, and small beer. Soup was probably the general solution for foreigners. Tea and coffee, unless bought by prisoners, were luxuries and not on the dietaries.

Their chief recreation was furnished by games of cards and dice and the occasional use of an old billiard table. Howard mentions games in the yards of "skittles, mississippi, portobello, tennis, fives and rackets." A habit of gambling and a feverish interest in lotteries were widespread in England at the time, and invaded the prisons.<sup>1</sup> Among prisoners of war this led to a terrible abuse. Those who were without assistance from home, and were unable to earn money by the exercise of skilled craftsmanship, or even a trifle only (from 3d. to 6d. a day) from prison service, at times felt their rations insufficient. They craved for tobacco; chewing or smoking allayed the pangs of hunger, soothed distracted nerves, and made life less unendurable. To obtain this alleviation an unlucky player often staked and forfeited his clothing, bedding, and rations, and even eventually lost his life. The prison surgeons who examined the emaciated corpses in hospital testified to starvation as the ultimate cause of death. This point is made tragically clear by M. de Curzon, but he relates the energetic steps taken in Liverpool<sup>2</sup> by surgeons and citizens to alter such conditions. "The naked, squalid, emaciated, shivering wretches made a most painful impression on my mind," says Dr. Currie himself, the humane, distinguished Liverpool physician, a pioneer in reforms for the poor, the sick and the insane, and an unimpeachable witness.<sup>3</sup> Dr.

<sup>1</sup> The Hon. Edward Cadogan, C.B., *The Roots of Evil*, 1937, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred de Curzon, *Dr. James Currie and the French prisoners of war in Liverpool*, 1926.

<sup>3</sup> James Currie, M.D., F.R.S., of Liverpool, 2 vols., 1931. Vol. I, p. 39.

Walker<sup>1</sup> gives an account of certain French prisoners at Norman Cross known as *les misérables*; and some known as *les Romains* or "Romans" are described in Sir Basil Thomson's *Story of Dartmoor Prison*,<sup>2</sup> and *les raffalés* on a prison hulk by Francis Abell.<sup>3</sup> These sets of prisoners were utterly intractable, naked, starving and diseased owing to their passion for gambling. The same kind of tragedy took place in French prisons and with English prisoners of war in Denmark.<sup>4 5</sup>

"A genuine Epistle of a Sailor" is quoted in the *Naval Chronicle*. Here is the definite appeal of a man craving for tobacco as a drug, perhaps a refuge from monotonous diet, constant discomfort, or from the effects of a flogging; for use after sea-surgery, or in shipwreck or captivity, in fact in all the vicissitudes of a seaman's life of the time. It is instructive in this connection.

Warren Hastings Est Indymun [*sic*] off Gravesend.

March 24, 1813.

Dear Brother-Tom—This cums hopein to find you in good health as it leaves me save ankord here yesterday at 4 P.M. arter a pleasant voyage tolerable short and few squalls. Dear Tom—hopes to find poor old father stout, am quite out of pigtail. Sights of pigtail at Gravesend but imfortinly not fit for a dog to chor. Dear Tom—Captain's boy will bring you this and put pigtail in his pocket when bort. Best in London at the black boy in 7 diles, where go, acks for best pigtail, pound of pigtail will do, and am short of shirts. Dear Tom—

<sup>1</sup> Thomas James Walker, M.D., F.R.C.S., *The Depot for prisoners of war at Norman Cross, Huntingdonshire, 1796-1816*. 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Basil Thomson, *The Story of Dartmoor Prison*, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Abell, *Prisoners of War in Britain*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Article on British Naval prisoners of war; *Chambers's Journal*, 1854. Vol. I, p. 330.

<sup>5</sup> Commander the Hon. Henry N. Shore, R.N., British Naval prisoners of war under Napoleon. *United Service Magazine*, June, 1914.

as for shirts only took 2 whereof 1 is quite wore out, and tuther most, but dont forget the pigtail as I ant had nere a quid to chor never sins Thursday. Dear Tom—as for the shirts your size will do, only longer. I likes um long, get one at present, best at tower Hill and cheap, but be particler to go to 7 diles for the pigtail at the black boy, and dear Tom—acks for pound of best pigtail and let it be good. Captain's boy will put the pigtail in his pocket, he like pigtail so ty it up. Dear Tom—shall be up about Monday there or thereabouts. Not so perticular for the shirt as the present can be washed, but dont forget the pigtail without fail so am

Your loving brother T.P.

P.S.—Dont forget pigtail.<sup>1</sup>

This letter may be compared with one from a Belgian deserter at Charlemont prison in 1805. *Je vous en prie . . . apportez-moi du tabac à fumer. Je vous en prie, ne l'oubliez pas.*<sup>2</sup>

George Borrow was only a child when he first beheld the prison at Norman Cross. That sight became a familiar one to him, and is described in an arresting page in *Lavengro*.

The beautiful and ingenious handiwork of the foreign prisoners and their manipulation of most limited material excite wonder and admiration in our museums and private collections.

Prisoners of war in England who were officers in the army or navy, and civilians "entitled to rank as gentlemen," resided in lodgings or private houses. Such prisoners who were all on parole, were widely scattered among inland provincial towns in England and Scotland. Prisoners might walk not more than one mile from their lodging and that only on a high road. Hundreds escaped; a few

<sup>1</sup> *The Naval Chronicle*, No. 30, 1813, p. 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettres de Grognauds*, 1936, p. 75.

were invalided home or exchanged; and many died in exile. They have been the subject of romances.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Francis Abell, in a book which is stern reading, finally condemns the system of English prison-ships or hulks, with judicial weight and severity. He describes the fifteen land prisons of the time, and also the conditions of life for prisoners on parole. For the latter class, there was little difference of treatment in England and France. Mr. Abell's<sup>2</sup> historical notes, collected from towns where French prisoners lived, are of great interest.

Both French and American prisoners were, perforce, persistent escapers; and there are contemporary records, in their respective countries, of such adventurers and of their sufferings, courage and endurance. Mr. Abell relates the thrilling narratives of Tom Souville and Louis Vanhille; but the outstanding one appears to be that of Louis Garneray in his book called *Mes Pontons*. He was a marine artist of distinction, and an author who describes the conditions on the hulks as inhuman and appalling. He also became a prisoner on parole.

But there was an ancient tradition of kindness and hospitality to prisoners of war. In 1797 Commander Antony Gardner, then a young officer in charge of a prize, conducted those of his prisoners who were officers to the doors of Mill Prison, where they had to be placed temporarily. Gardner had "but little money," but divided it among the Frenchmen and did what he could for their comfort, while they gave him a warm invitation to visit them in France when the war was over. One of them

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Stevenson, *St. Ives*, being the adventures of a French prisoner in England, 1898.

Margaret Wilson, *The Valiant Wife*, 1933. This tale gives a grim account of the sufferings of American prisoners at Dartmoor, in a romance.

Also mentioned in *The Complete Journal of Marjory Fleming*, transcribed and edited by Frank Sidgwick, 1935, p. 197 and note.

<sup>2</sup> *Prisoners of War in Britain, 1756-1815*; a record of their lives, their romance and their sufferings: by Francis Abell, 1914. *Oxford University Press*.

had been a prisoner of war at Petersfield previously, and spoke English well.<sup>1</sup>

Commodore Walker, privateer, when a young captain was himself captured by the French. He received much kindness. In 1745, when in command of the ship *Boscawen*, he captured "5 sail of French" after a courageous resistance. The Commodore of the French ships and a charming and spirited old French lady were saved among others from the wreck and the seas. Mr. Walker treated his prisoners as honoured and most unfortunate guests. It was said that he "outdid" the French generosity he had received. But Commodore Walker had a rare and exacting standard of behaviour in all things. One of his engaging traits was a love of music.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Elizabeth Carter in her letters to her friend describes the lively impression made in an assembly at Deal by French officers on parole in 1748. There was "one most agreeable man," she writes, "who talks a good deal, sings a good deal, and yet I cannot very well define why I do so greatly admire him. I believe, however, the strange enchantment that renders him so universally agreeable, must be the most settled look of good-nature and happiness that ever appeared in any human countenance. All the world is charmed with him as much as I. . . . There is another officer who is greatly esteemed by many people as a prodigious scholar and a poet, and a wit who writes satires and panegyrics. . . . I was thinking of a French officer who was there, and who was very entertaining. Miss Hall and I shared him by way of partner and between us we both did not suffer him to sit down a single dance, which perhaps you may think somewhat unmerciful; but surely there is no need of scruple about a

<sup>1</sup> James Antony Gardner, *Publications of the Navy Records Society*. Vol. 31 p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Commodore Walker, *Voyages and cruises, 1760*. Introduction and notes, by H. S. Vaughan. Seafarer's Library, Melbourne, 1928.

Frenchman, a species of creature composed entirely of air and fire, with no one principle of lassitude in it. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

*Beau chevalier qui partez pour la guerre,  
Qu'allez-vous faire  
Si loin d'ici?*

My friend, Miss Lily Yeats, writes from Dublin (November, 1936)—

. . . an uncle of Papa's, Robert Corbet, born at the end of the eighteenth century, when a young ensign quartered at Hastings, had a French prisoner, an officer, to guard. He took him everywhere he went to parties and dinners. He spoke no French and his prisoner no English, but they got on famously, and great-uncle Corbet to the end of his days, Papa said, liked to drop a French word correctly spoken into his talk, his memorial to his prisoner and friend.

Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, when Captain in command of the *Orion*, in a letter of November 14, 1805, commends le Capitaine Louis Antoine Cyprian Infernet, prisoner of war, to the kindness of his wife in England. "My French messmate, Capitaine Infernet of *L'Intrépide*, and his son, go home with Harvey in the *Téméraire*. I have written to Bowen to get him his parole in the place<sup>2</sup> where his Admiral [Villeneuve] will be on the same terms, and do anything he can to assist him; and to you I commend him for the rest. I was prevented saving for him anything but the things in which he came on board, besides his watches and some little money. Captain Hallowell of the *Tigre* although not in the action of the 21st has insisted upon sending him a trunk with two dozen shirts, stockings, a bed, and some cloth to make him a coat, and a draft for 100*l.* as an acknowledgment of the civility he met with from Gantheaume and his officers

<sup>1</sup> *Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catharine Talbot, 1741-1770, etc.* 4 vols., 1809. Vol. I, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> At Reading.

when their prisoner. At present, therefore, he is very well off; but for hereafter, as his wife and family are at Toulon, and he has nothing but his pay, at the age of fifty, after forty years' services, I wish you to supply any wants he may have to the amount of 100*l*.<sup>1</sup>

The prisoners who died on Medway hulks were buried in the marshes. Owing to changes wrought by time, to the nature of the swamps, and to the needs of the living, the bones of the prisoners had to be removed, and were placed in the French Cemetery on St. Mary's Island, in 1869. In 1904, another removal had to be made to the present site. This is within the Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham, by the main gate, behind St. George's Church.<sup>2</sup> The inspired epitaph placed by the Admiralty on the pedestal of the memorial-figure may well conclude this chapter.

HERE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER  
THE REMAINS OF MANY BRAVE SOLDIERS AND SAILORS  
WHO HAVING ONCE BEEN THE FOES AND AFTERWARDS  
THE CAPTIVES OF ENGLAND  
NOW FIND REST IN HER SOIL  
REMEMBERING NO MORE THE ANIMOSITIES OF WAR, OR  
THE SORROWS OF IMPRISONMENT,  
THEY WERE DEPRIVED OF THE CONSOLATION OF CLOSING  
THEIR EYES  
AMONG THE COUNTRYMEN THEY LOVED  
BUT THEY HAVE BEEN LAID IN AN HONOURED GRAVE  
BY A NATION WHICH KNOWS HOW TO RESPECT VALOR  
AND TO SYMPATHISE WITH MISFORTUNE.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir Edward Codrington, *Memoir of the Life of*, edited by his daughter, Lady Bouchier. 2 Vols., 1873. Vol. I, p. 86.

*L'Intépide Infernet*, as he was to be famed in France after Trafalgar, swam to the *Orion* with his son, a midshipman of ten, on his back. For an account of this gallant hero, see Edward Fraser, *The Enemy at Trafalgar*, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Prisoner of War Memorial* (Commander R. S. Lecky, C.B., A.M., R.N.). By the courtesy of Captain A. L. Poland, R.N.

<sup>3</sup> Lines 'written by the late Sir Stafford Northcote, afterwards Lord Iddesleigh. . . .'  
*Prisoners of War in Britain*, etc., Francis Abell, 1914, p. 46.



## CHAPTER II

### ESCAPE OF FELIX DURAND FROM THE TOWER PRISON IN LIVERPOOL. 1759

THERE is an old farce called "The Liverpool Prize" printed in 1779 and performed "with universal applause" in the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. One of the characters, upon hearing that the French prisoners were going ashore, says:

"I am glad of this: we shall now have a free view of a ragged regiment. The first time I ever saw a procession of French prisoners, it frightened me. I thought the world was at an end, when I beheld so many skeletons in motion, and that the gibbets had resigned their dead, as a warning to the graves to follow their example." (The prisoners come in guarded by sailors, with cutlasses, drums and fiddles, playing *Britons Strike Home*.) "Come on my noble fellows, lodge safe your prisoners, see them well treated, then all hands aboard, and once more have at the French."

The item of "A seddan chair provided for the French captain" occurs in the accounts of a Liverpool Privateer in 1779.<sup>1</sup>

Howard notes that prisoners on board men-of-war were indeed often "on short allowance," and this may have also been the case on privateers.

One French prisoner, Felix Durand, in or about 1759, has left a narrative of his escape from the Tower of Liverpool prison and his subsequent adventures. This slight but vivid story is available and is given here with its glimpse of old England and of the birth of a great seaport.

<sup>1</sup> Gomer Williams, *Liverpool Privateers, with an account of the Liverpool Slave-trade*, 1897.

To the solitary Dock, mentioned by Durand, trade and privateering were to bring in a short space of time almost fabulous prosperity.

The Tower of Liverpool was no better than other prisons of the time. In a dim and stately past it was owned by members of the Stanley family, and sometimes they used it as a lodging while "waiting for a wind" to take them to the Isle of Man. The Tower<sup>1</sup> had borne the clash of battles, and weathered the storms and tides of centuries, upon the shores of the clear waters of the River Mersey. But the Corporation found their town prison too small in 1737, and leased the Tower in its sullen old age for partial use as a Borough Goal. Here some hundreds of Frenchmen, probably captured by Liverpool privateers, spent a crowded and squalid existence. Felix Durand's story is printed from the original MS. by Mr. Stonehouse, in his interesting *Recollections of Old Liverpool by a Nonagenarian* (1863).<sup>2</sup> His own father, who also lived to be ninety, was owner and commander of the *Mary Ellen*. "Although a slave-captain, and afterwards a privateer, my father was a kind and just man—a good father, husband and friend. His purse and his advice were always ready to help and save, and he was, consequently, much respected by the merchants with whom he had intercourse. I have been told he was quite a different man at sea," his son goes on, "that there he was harsh, unbending, and stern, but still just. How he used to rule the turbulent spirits of his crews I don't know, but certain it is that he never wanted

<sup>1</sup> The best known picture of the Tower is shown in Richard Wright's oil painting of Liverpool in 1760, and in numerous views reproduced in Herdman's four volumes.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. James Stonehouse was chief superintendent of the Liverpool markets under the Corporation for many years; had been formerly reporter for the *Liverpool Standard* and afterwards local correspondent for the *Chester Chronicle*; wrote *Liverpool Streets*; lived at Neston; welcomed Dickens to Liverpool, 26th Feb. 1814, with eight verses "elegantly printed on gold with white satin."

men when other Liverpool ship-owners were short of hands. Many of his seamen sailed voyage after voyage with him." Mr. Stonehouse gives a lively account of the launching of the *Mary Ellen*, when he himself was a young child. He had played about in the hold, when the ship was being fitted for sea, running along the "long shelves with ring-bolts in rows," little realising their sinister destination. The bells were ringing for King George III's birthday as the child walked with his father and mother in new clothes at the head of a little procession of friends, headed by a drum and fife. Crowds had assembled to see the launch, for Captain Stonehouse was very popular. After "the great splash" was over, friends were taken to the Ranelagh tea-gardens, where, on the site of the present Adelphi Hotel, amidst lilacs and laburnums, and gay flower-beds round a Chinese temple, the guests, in little alcoves or bowers, drank tea—or was it *braggart*?—which was made of ale, sugar, spices and eggs. There was a large fishpond with fat carp in it, and in the concert-room were singers, or jugglers, or "Stephens giving his lecture on *Heads*." Fireworks came later, and so darkness falls on the old Martingdale Hill, now Mount Pleasant.

Captain Stonehouse kept a book called *The Family Log*, and on 6th May 1759, he records the escape of fifteen French prisoners from the Tower, Durand among the number. The Captain had often seen and talked with this prisoner, who had the reputation of ingenuity in repairs, and had undertaken to restore a curious foreign box belonging to Mrs. Stonehouse.

Durand's narrative is followed here as given by Captain Stonehouse, but has had to be shortened. The names of roads and places are in brackets in the MS. but have been slightly altered to make the geography clearer.

"Weary of the detestable prison, with its scanty food

and straw beds on the floor," Durand determined to try to escape to Ireland. He was acquainted with a Mr. P—— who lived in Dale Street; and his niece, *tout-à-fait charmante*, had often brought work for Durand to do, and had taken charge of money, so earned, to deposit with her uncle on account.

" . . . I hold that young lady in the highest consideration. This place is bad for anyone to have property in, although we are in misery alike. Some of us do not know the difference between my own and thy own. We have strange communistic ideas in this building. Now, *M. le Capitaine*, you want to know how I got away, where I went, and how I came back. I will tell you. I could not help it. I have had a pleasing three months' holiday, and must be content to wait for peace or death, to release me from this *sacré* place."

This "very engaging young lady" conversed with him in the hall where prisoners were permitted to see their friends. She told him that adjoining the East side of the prison were two houses, opening into a short, narrow street. One was being repaired, and was only partly tenanted. Mademoiselle was kind enough to examine, and to report that an open yard lay under the eastern prison wall. Durand told his fourteen companions; all were penned up together at nights in "a vile cell or vault," and thus no secrets could be kept. All resolved to escape. The cell was dirty and miserable. Light and air came from the street, and from a grating over the door. But it was situated on the east side of the Tower prison. If anyone could get through that wall, he might easily continue his route through the house and into the street. Choosing a stormy night, the prisoners began to loosen the stonework in the east wall. They were locked up by night and seldom troubled by the gaolers in the daytime, when all could walk about the prison freely, prisoners of

war, felons, and debtors alike. Before daybreak two large stones had been displaced, and the mortar and rubbish hidden in the straw beds, or covered as well as possible. One prisoner remained, for extra security, in bed; the window was curtained with a blanket, the *compatriote* was very ill. Unless urgently summoned, there was indeed little fear of a doctor appearing, and the day passed safely. Towards nightfall, a hurricane of wind and rain favoured the escapers, by clearing the streets of prowlers. Work began again, and presently one man crept through the hole into the yard; he said heavy rain was falling, and the night was *affreuse*.

All now crept through, and found themselves in a dark yard, with a house before them. "We obtained a light in a shed on one side of the yard, and then looked about. We found a sort of cellar door by the side of a window. We tried to open it; to our surprise it yielded. Screening our light, we proceeded into a passage, taking off our shoes and stockings first (some of us had none to take off, poor fellows!) so that we should make no noise. The house was quite still; we scarcely dared to breathe. We went forward and entered a kitchen in which were the remains of a supper. We took possession of all that was eatable on the table. It was wonderful that nobody heard us, for one of us let fall a knife after cutting up a piece of beef into pieces, so that each man might have a share. Although there were people in the house no one heard us; truly you Englishmen sleep well! Before us was a door—we opened it. It was only a closet. We next thought of the window, for we dared not climb upstairs to the principal entrance. We tried the shutters which we easily took down, and, fortunately without noise, opened the window, through which one of us crept to reconnoitre. He was only absent about a minute or two, returning to tell us that not a soul was to be seen anywhere; the wind was

rushing up the main [Water] street from the sea, and the rain was coming down in absolute torrents."

The prisoners now found themselves in an open passage, running behind the Tower, and leading through an archway into Water Street.

"Just as the neighbouring church clock struck two, we were assembled under an archway<sup>1</sup> together. We determined to disperse, and let every man take care of himself. Bidding my friends good-bye, I struck out into the street."

The sea-port into which Durand stepped out of prison was utterly unlike the city of to-day, and is best realised by studying old prints and drawings. Liverpool was built along the shore, near the river and sea from which her wealth and fortunes were to be derived. Here were clustered dwelling-houses, churches, inns and coffee-houses, the Tower, the custom-house and "the Dock" (mentioned by Durand). The beautiful though ill-paved and badly kept streets, dimly lit at nights by flickering oil lamps, led to gently sloping fields and country roads and lanes. All goods, and even mails, were then carried upon pack-horses, and the bridle-paths and lonely roads were so desolate that several trains of horses used to muster in Dale Street before all started together, for protection against highwaymen. The nearest coach-road was at Warrington until 1760, when the first coaches began to run from Liverpool to London, taking four days on the road.

Durand decided to go inland. His companions appear to have been recaptured; or, in their misery, having made no preparations or plans for escape, to have given themselves up to the guards. Straight up Water Street, past the old Exchange, and along the narrow old Dale Street, Durand fled. "Here Mademoiselle dwelt, I thought of

<sup>1</sup> R. Stewart Brown, *The Tower of Liverpool*. See "plan." Privately printed (50 copies) in Liverpool, 1910.

her," he says, "but had no hope of seeing her, as I did not know the house where she resided."

So he pushed on till at the foot of a hill, he closed his eyes and chose one of three roads—Old Haymarket, Townsend Lane [now Byrom Street] and Shaw's Brow [now William Brown Street]. He chose Shaw's Brow, leading to London Road. "I passed up a narrow street, with low dirty-looking houses on each side, and, from the broken mugs and earthenware my feet encountered in the darkness, I felt sure I was passing through the outskirts of Liverpool, famous for its earthenware manufactures."

He saw no living thing, "in fact, it was scarcely possible for anything to withstand the storm that raged so vehemently. In this, however, rested my safety. I sped on, and soon mounting the hill, paused by the side of a large windmill [Townsend Mill] which stood at the top of London Road."

Here Durand clearly went right, about the present Pembroke Place, and directly up past the site of the present Royal Infirmary to Edge Hill.

"I began now to breathe freely and feel some hope . . . my limbs, which from long confinement in prison were stiff at first, now felt elastic and nimble, and I pushed on at a quick pace, the wind blowing at my back the whole time, still onward I went until I got into a country lane and had another hill to mount. The roads were very heavy. The sidewalk was badly kept, and the rain made it ankle-deep in mud." The hill was called Edge Hill, and the road lined with trees.

As the clock struck three, he reached the little village of Wavertree, "and still not a soul was visible. I might have been passing through a world of the dead." Feeling very thirsty, he filled his cap with water from a large pond, and resting beneath a sheltering tree, he ate his

bread and meat, and rested for half an hour. He then started on his way determining to try and reach Ireland, where he knew a certain French priest in Dublin, who would help. He hit upon a plan, as he walked on, probably keeping to the right by Mossley Hill towards Garston, and then diverging to Hale.

His plan involved ready wit, stern concentration and incessant wakefulness, for he had decided to appear deaf and dumb. He must keep a blank face while others discussed his "misfortune," suppressing speech or exclamation or gesture. It was a part that might have disconcerted the cleverest actor.

At length, through narrow lanes, he reached "a quaint little village [Hale], in which there was a church then building. The houses were constructed principally of timber, lath and plaster, and were, apparently, of great antiquity."

Rain was still beating down heavily and the wind blowing. In a quarter of an hour, he caught sight "of the river or the sea,"<sup>1</sup> and came to a little cottage, the door of which stood open as he passed. An old woman came out and began to take down the shutters. Now was the time for his experiment. He went quietly to work, taking the shutters from the old lady's hands, and laying them in their proper places. He then found a broom, with which he swept the rain from the cottage doorstep. He found a kettle, and gravely filled it at a pump close by.

The old lady was "dumb-struck." She gazed at this brownie of a namelessly strange aspect while he went to the fireplace, and raked out the cinders and began to make a fire of sticks. Neither of them spoke. Durand nearly laughed.

"We must have looked a curious couple, the woman

<sup>1</sup> At that point is the widest part of the river, which might at high tide be mistaken for the sea.



standing staring at me, and I on a three-legged stool, with my elbows on my knees, looking steadfastly at her."

At length, in her broad Lancashire dialect, she seemed to ask who he was? and whither he was going? Durand opened his mouth very wide, keeping his tongue close, as if he had none, and with fingers to his ears, "made a gesture that he was deaf and dumb."

"She then said 'poor man, poor man,' with great feeling and gave me a welcome." So he sat and dried his soaked clothing by the fire, and being wet and weary, fell asleep. And the next thing he saw was a substantial meal of bread, cold bacon and beer on the table, and the old woman signing to him to partake. This he "was not loathe to do," but had first shown her his empty pockets; but she shook her head, and Durand ate a hearty breakfast. Then he saw several tasks waiting, such as getting in coal and sweeping, and began to work hard as some repayment for the hospitable kindness he had received. "We Frenchmen can turn our hands to almost anything, and my dexterity quite pleased the old lady." But hearing the swift sound of a horse's feet approaching, he was seized with sudden panic, and catching up his cap, dropped the broom and fled, leaping a hedge and running like a hunted hare across the fields. He hid among the rushes by a pond, but it was a false alarm, and Durand saw the horseman riding swiftly away into the distance.

After some hours of wandering and walking, the Frenchman stepped into a barn, where threshers were at work, and asked, in his dumb fashion, if he might rest there. The men stared and whispered, but let him lie down; he slept in the straw for some hours. Waking, with senses alert, in spite of the strange place and talk, he began to plait some baskets such as he and his fellow-prisoners made for sale. One of the men offered to buy one. Durand refused payment at first, but the honest fellow insisted,

and one of the others also admired and purchased a basket. Then a "big man" who was the farmer or master appeared, and they told him Durand was a "dumby and deafy." The farmer bawled unavailing questions into Durand's shrinking ears, and finally, being soft-hearted, beckoned him indoors, calling to his wife to get dinner ready. "A capital piece of beef, bread, and boiled greens or cabbage were soon on the table, to which I sat down with the farmer and his wife." Presently the daughter of the house appeared, and Durand rose, and presented her with the remaining basket. "I could scarcely help laughing when I heard them canvass my personal appearance, my merits and demerits. Pity, however, seemed to be the predominant feeling."

After dinner, the resourceful Durand noticed an old clock on the wall, which had stopped. He quietly removed it, took off the face, and did the small needful repairs with the aid of a pair of pincers and an old skewer off the window-ledge. The farmer slapped him on the back, and the "dumb" man proceeded to mend a chair, repair a china vase, clean an old picture, and at last to take the lock off the door, mend it, and alter the key. By night he had done a "good pound's worth of repairs." He had supper and was given leave to sleep in the barn.

It is not clear from Durand's story where he had wandered to after his flight from the cottage. Nor are we told where the farm was situated.

Next morning the farmer's daughter found him very busy in the yard, feeding the pigs. He determined to remain where he was, working hard, till the wonder of his escape was forgotten, when he might hope to get away somehow to England.

So there he stayed, and laboured, and was fed, but at each week's end the farmer's wife secretly gave him some money. He made several trifles for "Mademoiselle" which

she highly prized, and, through her, he says, he left his snug quarters. The foreman was courting this Miss Mary "on the sly," and grew jealous, and Durand felt himself to be no match for "this great Hercules." Besides he wished no quarrel or gossip to arise. So he sadly put up his spare clothes, some of them given him by that "kindly Christian" the farmer's wife, and set off one morning with a heavy heart and no idea where to go, or what to do next. But he left a little parcel for the housewife, containing "a tobacco box for Mr. John Bull, a bodkin-case for herself, and a little ring for Miss Mary, all of which I had made in my leisure time. I dare say they were sorry to part with me. I am sure Miss Mary was, for I fancied she suspected I was not what I seemed, and had begun to take an evident liking for me. I had taught her some French modes of cooking, which excited surprise, as well as gratification to their palates, and I taught her two or three little ways of making fancy articles that pleased her exceedingly. It was through her manifesting a preference for me, that, as I have told you, *M. le Capitaine*, I felt obliged to absent myself from her father's employment. It was most difficult at first to restrain myself from talking. But I soon got over that, for when I was about to speak, I made an uncertain sort of noise, which turned off suspicion." All the same, Durand felt that the foreman had his doubts.

He decided to stay in the neighbourhood of Liverpool, thinking Mr. P—— might somehow befriend him. By nightfall he had reached Warrington, "a town by a river, full of quaint old houses of timber and plaster." Here he bought food at a small shop; "A Frenchman does not want very heavy meals, so that I did pretty well." The baker's wife, when she found him to be deaf and dumb, refused to take his money, and gave him meat and potatoes as well as bread. She had a relative similarly afflicted. Durand now begged straw at a farm-yard, and "turned to

his never-failing fountain [source] of help," making baskets, and other trifles, which sold readily in the town.

But one day, in a tavern, he heard the word "Liverpool" and trembled. Two drovers were talking of a great fire there near the dock, and then, of the escape from prison of certain Frenchmen. Durand heard that his companions had been recaptured, or had given themselves up, one by one, and he listened to the tale of their miseries. A hot search was on foot after the last man, the supposed ringleader.

Owing to his (supposed) infirmities, and his manual dexterity, Durand had become "an object of public remark." He had noticed "lodgings to let" in the window of the little baker's shop, and arranged, in his dumb show, with the good woman of the house, to hire the room, which, though poor and small, was very clean. But now this must be given up, and he paid his kind landlady generously and "shaped his way Northward."

He then visited Manchester and some other towns, and excited general pity and received much kindness. He thus established quite a connection among the farmers and gentry. At one house he mended a teapot and a plough-share, at another repaired a cart for a gentleman and almost rebuilt a boat for use in a fish-pond. "I turned my hand to any and everything, I do not say I did everything well, but I did it satisfactorily to those who employed me. I now began to be troubled about my money, which was accumulating, being obliged to carry it about with me, as I feared to be pillaged of it."

He decided to return to Liverpool, and find Mr. P—— at all hazards, hiding in the dark streets out of sight of prison warders. He was at Upholland, repairing weavers' looms, when fate intervened.

He had climbed to a "beacon tower" near the town, one Sunday, to enjoy the fine view. He walked on down the hill past a moated hall, to a picturesque bridge over

a small stream (noted by Captain Stonehouse as Cobb's Brow Bridge). Here were some fine old oak-trees, and Durand, resting in the shade, saw "a cavalcade coming down the road, consisting of two ladies and a gentleman mounted on fine horses, and attended by two serving-men or grooms. When the party had arrived opposite the trees they stopped to examine them, when one of the ladies, struck with the wonderful size of the largest tree, expressed her admiration of it in very purely-pronounced French. I was so surprised that I became completely unnerved, was thrown off my guard, and in the excitement of the moment, at hearing my native tongue so beautifully pronounced, sprang up, and rushing forward echoed in my own tongue the lady's commendation of those grand old trees. I immediately found out my error, for, to my grief, the other young lady, whom I at once recognised, exclaimed—"why this is the dumb man who was at the Hall the other day, repairing the broken glass vases!"

The grooms now identified Durand also, and the gentleman called him an impostor and ordered them to seize him. Durand admitted everything. The ladies now begged for his release, but the gentleman ordered his servants to take him to "Ormschurch" [Ormskirk] about five miles away, "and have me put into the little prison there, which you call the cage. The ladies, with tears in their eyes on seeing me thus seized by the servant-men, begged them not to use me roughly, and one of them slipped a gold piece into my hand, bidding me in French, to be of good cheer, for there was talk of immediate peace, when I should be released."

The gentleman rode away, calling on the young ladies to follow him, and one of the men bade Durand get up behind him on a stout horse, and so they rode in an hour to the town. It was full of people in Sunday clothes. Some pitied, and some execrated the prisoner, who was followed

by crowds of boys. "After waiting in the street some time, I was taken before a stout, growling old gentleman, who ordered me to be locked up until the next morning, and to have meat and drink given me." So Durand was put into a small, square room, with straw on the floor, and benches round the walls. "It had no fireplace, and was sadly uncomfortable."

However, this philosopher, having received a good supply of bread, meat and beer, found the straw tolerably fresh and clean, and did not do so badly. He therefore lay down, covered himself up with the straw, and was soon fast asleep. About six o'clock next morning he was placed in an open cart, and after a rough and tiresome journey, arrived at the Tower at night, "having enjoyed a three months' holiday to my great satisfaction. Here, then, I am, waiting for death or peace to release me. I shall now finish your box if you are not too offended with me for neglecting your commission so long. I may tell you that Mademoiselle P—— was here this morning; tears were in her lovely eyes, and she seemed very glad to see me back, at which I somewhat wondered, especially if she esteemed me. I should have thought she would rather have relished my escaping altogether, than being caught again."

"My father," continues Mr. Stonehouse, "appends a note to the effect that, through the intervention of Sir Edward Cunliffe, one of the members for Liverpool, Durand was released from the Tower, and went to reside with Mr. P—— in Dale Street. At the date of September following, there is a memorandum to the effect that M. Durand and Miss P—— had become man and wife, so that, as my father quaintly adds, he supposes M. Durand had by that time found out why it was that old P's daughter was so glad to see him again in prison."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prisoners of war in Liverpool later occupied a new gaol which became known as "the French prison."

## CHAPTER III

### CAPTURE AND JOURNEY TO VERDUN OF MIDSHIPMEN EDWARD BOYS AND FREDERICK WHITEHURST. 1803

NAPOLEON'S EDICT.

ST. CLOUD, 2ND PRAIRIAL,  
*Eleventh Year of the Republic.*

All the English enrolled in the militia, from the age of eighteen to sixty, holding a commission from his Britannic Majesty, who are at present in France, shall be made prisoners of war, to answer for the citizens of the republic, who have been arrested and made prisoners of war by the vessels or subjects of his Britannic Majesty before the declaration of war.

The ministers, each, as far as concerns him, are charged with the execution of the present decree.

The First Consul (*signed*)  
BUONAPARTE.

THE story of the escape of certain midshipmen, taken prisoners after the renewal of the war with France in 1803, is told by Captain Boys in his *Narrative of a Captivity and Adventures in France and Flanders between the years 1808 and 1809*. This book was written (from notes) in 1810 in the West Indies, but not published till 1827, in order to ensure the safety of those named therein who had given help and protection to the fugitives. Although Edward Boys was only eighteen at the time of his capture, a short account from O'Byrne's *Naval Dictionary of 1849* shows that he was not inexperienced.

Edward Boys, born in 1785, was the son of John Boys (1749-1824), a Kentish agriculturist, who published works

on rural subjects and was famed for his breed of South-down sheep. Edward entered the Navy in 1796, as first-class volunteer, becoming a midshipman in various vessels.

From October 1800 until 26th April 1802, when he was paid off, he served as master's mate on the flagship *Royal Sovereign*, bearing the flag of Sir Henry Hervey, K.B. In the following June he joined the frigate *Phoebe*, 36 guns, Captain the Hon. Bladen Capel, on the Mediterranean Station. In July 1803 the *Phoebe* was ordered off Toulon to watch the enemy in that port. On the night of the 31st, two armed boats under the orders of Lieutenant Tickell were sent inshore to capture any vessel running along the coast, that he might judge worth the risk of an attack.

Edward Boys was entrusted with the charge of one boat. At dawn, two *settées* were sighted, carrying fruit and merchandisc from Genoa to Marseilles, and captured. Boys was appointed prize-master to one and Midshipmen Murray and Whitehurst to the other.<sup>1</sup> They were under orders to proceed and report to Lord Nelson, then on the Catalonian coast, and thence to Malta. But the English ships were attacked by four French frigates, and the two prizes and the schooner *Redbridge*, with a transport, were all ultimately captured, the *Phoebe* having a miraculous escape. The seaman's pleasure in visiting a fresh port [Toulon] was marred, for Boys, by the recollection that he was a prisoner, cut off from country and friends, at the outbreak of war; and this after seven years' service, when he had expected soon to join the *Victory*, with the hope of promotion. No wonder, then, that he felt indifferent to

<sup>1</sup> Captain Basil Hall, R.N., F.R.S., The Midshipman. From *Fragments of Voyages and Travels*, 1865. See chapters 14, 15, 16, duties and heavy responsibilities of midshipmen as prize-masters, pp. 163-192.

Also "Cutting Out," article in *Chambers's Journal*, vol. I, January to June 1854, p. 318.



the beauties of the scene, and a "temporary gloom" was cast on his spirit.

Prisoners were kept on board the frigate *Rhin* for twenty-one days' quarantine. Boys and his fellow midshipmen were examined separately, and their refusal to answer questions about Lord Nelson's strength and situation so enraged the Captain, that he had them parted from the officers of the *Redbridge*, and placed in ranks with the Master and ninety men of the transport. All were ordered to Verdun.

On 26th August, the midshipmen began their long march through France, each with a loaf slung over the shoulder, no change of linen, and only four dollars between them (which Whitehurst happened to possess)—under threat of being shot if they broke ranks. They spent the first night in the dust and dirt of a "swinery." Next morning they were given another black loaf and sevenpence halfpenny each, as five days' pay. During the day's march, the grim French Captain of the escort relaxed somewhat, and entertained them with gruesome tales of the Reign of Terror.

At Aix, they thankfully parted from this "inhuman offspring of tumult." The new officer in charge was a venerable and affable gentleman—*Voyons! Soyez gais*, was his greeting; things might be worse. Here they washed their linen, and, encouraged by his kindness, the lads almost forgot they were prisoners. Before the officer left them at Tarascon he gave orders for their comfort, took them for a walk, and sent a boy with them up the river, where they bathed, and again washed and dried their linen, reluctantly returning to prison. Boys began to learn something of the French language.

At Nismes they were marching to prison, when some English *détenus* interfered; and they enjoyed hospitality, and "were the ravenous guests" of Doctor Grey of Rams-

gate (afterwards Sir Thomas) and others; all sought to cheer them with prospects of a speedy release. Those gentlemen also raised a subscription for the men, which Boys divided equally among them. He was then eighteen. Another piece of luck was that the Master of the Transport cashed a draft of twenty pounds for Whitehurst.

The journey continued from Montpellier to Narbonne, and onwards till on 12th September they reached Toulouse. After an hour amidst an immense but civil crowd, they were put on parole, being told that a British officer values his honour too much to render his signature necessary. Swelling with British pride, and relieved, for the time, of the worst indignities and hardships, they wandered into the streets.

"To those," says Boys, "who have never quitted their own firesides, our situation at the moment may seem to have been desolate enough—without friends, without experience; without any knowledge of the language of those, amongst whom the fate of war had thrown us. But sailors are not prone to despondency; and the buoyancy of youthful spirits kept us from dwelling upon present difficulties, or anticipating further troubles."

A gentleman now came up, addressed them in English, and offered to find them a lodging. After three weeks, their pay being increased, they were more comfortably placed, and indulged in *table-d'hôte*, and the luxury of a bed each. Their first friend introduced Boys to a family named Prévost, and he was encouraged to study French, and went to the theatre in the evenings. Lieutenant McKenzie, a passenger on the *Phoebe*, now arrived, and six midshipmen, Blakeney, Temple, Maxwell, Barklay and Edwards of the *Redbridge*, "and they made up a large and rather merry party." In October, Boys received a remittance from his father. On 2nd December, they had to march on; "the accomplished and kind Mrs. Prévost

embracing me as tenderly as though I had been her own child." It is in such occasional glimpses only, throughout his story, that we realise the appealing youthfulness and charm of the author.

At Auch six of them took up quarters in the house of a *ci-devant* nobleman who had reached England in the course of his travels. Boys says: "His every act and expression, whether flowing from head or heart, evinced that nature had bestowed on him her choicest gifts, in beautiful profusion." When, on 11th December, the order came to move on to Verdun, this friend persuaded the bankers to lend Boys twenty pounds, on a draft; and thus enabled them to protect themselves from the inclement and wintry weather.

On the 16th they arrived, very late, at Cahors. "Thence we marched northwardly. Nothing occurred worth notice but the loss of the guards, who had fallen asleep in drunkenness; we, however, marched on without them. Scarcely had we sat down to dinner on the 21st (in the town of Brive) when we were surprised by the *gendarmes*—in a state of consternation, changing to elation, when all prisoners were found to be present." By consent of the *gendarmes*, they were once, at any rate, allowed to hire some mules. They remained at Limoges on the 23rd and 24th, and marched on, halting at times, and eating their mournful Christmas dinner in a miserable village. Sometimes they slept at an inn, sometimes in a prison. "On the 7th we arrived at Orleans, and were joined by Lt. Prater, of the Second West India regiment, captured on his passage from Honduras to England in the brig *Rachel* of Liverpool: "commanded" says Boys, "by Mr. Seacome Ellison, who was respected and beloved by all who knew him, and with whom I became on terms of intimacy through life."

On 16th January 1804, they left Troyes, and the remainder of the twenty pounds was spent on a scanty breakfast. "Lt. McKenzie, seeing that the reduced circumstances of

our party now compelled us to keep aloof from the dinner table, most handsomely insisted that his remaining cash should be shared among us." So they fared well again. This gentleman had been treated harshly and one of the *gendarmes* threatened to lash him to a horse's tail if he did not walk faster, "which put his Scotch blood into such a state of fermentation, that his friends had difficulty in restraining him."

At long last, on 21st January they reached Verdun. Escorted to the Citadel, Boys was put on parole (which he signed) and was permitted to take a lodging in the town, where there were then about 400 English. For a description of Verdun at that time we pass to the narrative of Seacome Ellison.

## CHAPTER IV

### CAPTURE AND ARRIVAL AT VERDUN OF SEACOME ELLISON.<sup>1</sup> (1803-1809)

THERE appears to be no biography of Ellison (1775-1854), though the Liverpool Portrait Collection includes a small engraving of him.

He was the son of Thomas Ellison of Litherland, and Martha, daughter of John Seacome, the son (or grandson) of John Seacome, author of *Memoirs of the House of Stanley*, of which curious work editions appeared published respectively at Manchester, Warrington, and Liverpool.<sup>2</sup> This historian is known to have been steward of Lord Derby's household about 1734.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Stewart Brown

<sup>1</sup> *Prison Scenes and Narrative of Escape from France during the War*, by Seacome Ellison, London, 1838.

<sup>2</sup> From *Transactions of Hist. Soc. of Lancs. and Cheshire*, 2nd series, vol. 3, Liverpool, 1875; by the courtesy of Mr. Smith, chief librarian of Liverpool.

<sup>3</sup> *The Tower of Liverpool*; R. Stewart Brown, p. 30, pp. 41-42. See also *Act for Vesting certain estates devised by the will of John Seacome*. 1817.

relates that when the Tower of Liverpool was finally demolished "as an unproductive asset of the Corporation" about 1821 "a bulbous bottle of olive-coloured glass, dating from the sixteenth century was found. It bore on the neck a medallion in relief with the badge of the Stanley family, the eagle and child, upon it."

This relic, surviving, as certain frail material things do, the human generations of their owners, was at one time in the possession of Miss Ellison of Litherland, a sister to the writer of the prison scenes.

"It was my lot," says Seacome Ellison, "(not liking the confinement of a counting-house,<sup>1</sup> into which my uncle had taken me) to bind myself apprentice to an old man, who was himself chief owner of the vessel; he worked me hard and fed me upon the coarsest food. I do not call it my misfortune, for through it I acquired habits of industry and endurance of which I have experienced the advantage all my life; what then I endured invigorated my body, and inured it to hardships, taught me to put my hand to anything and shift for myself. He traded to Jamaica, calling at Madeira—the longest voyage then made out of the port [of Liverpool] except to Africa. Liverpool was then comparatively in her infancy, and a foreign arrival was not an everyday occurrence. When the signal was made for one on Bidston-hill, it was buzzed all over the town, and the pier-heads were crowded to see the stranger enter the Mersey; and immediately her white sails were seen over the rock point, the old church bells struck up an exhilarating peal. As she touched the pierhead, the friends of the crew leapt on board to welcome them back again; and at night, at the hour the master was supposed to have gone to rest, a band of music regularly planted

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hughes, writing of Liverpool banks and bankers (1760-1837), states that a merchant (not a shopkeeper), did his business in a "counting-house," and brokers or attorneys did theirs in an "office."

John Hughes, *Liverpool Banks and Bankers, 1760-1857*. 1906, p. 11.

themselves at his door, to give him a serenade, in order to lull him to sleep after the fatigues of his long voyage. Then, a master of a foreigner was reckoned somebody in society, especially the master of a Guinea-man (as the slavers were then called), who could vie with his employer in extravagance, to which dignity most of the sea aspirants to riches looked.

"We had only salt beef and bread, and pork and peas, for our diet, save *one* ox-cheek on a Thursday, and fresh beef on Sundays. No cocoa, no coffee, no sugar, no anything at all approaching to luxury. Occasionally we had flour, but only water to mix it up with. The beef sometimes was so bad, that upon receiving it from the cook, we have pitched it overboard."<sup>1</sup>

We may compare the story of Captain Crow of Liverpool fame, when he was mate on the ship *James*, Captain Gibson; which, after leaving Bonny, with its cargo of 400 blacks, grounded on a bank. "At last" says Crow "I went down with the carpenter into the hold, and, searching for the leak, heard the water rushing through the bottom of the fore peak, where, it appeared, a splice had been made in the keel. We got all the pieces of beef we could muster, and crammed them into the leak; and this expedient we found had a good effect." "The bread being in bags, for the convenience of storage," goes on Ellison, "was towards the end of the voyage perforated by weevils, and honeycombed with maggots. These by day we could eject from their dwelling-places, but by night we must masticate them or fast. My general diet, when I could procure it, was bread soaked in lemonade—if sugar, water and lime-juice, mixed in a tin-pot, may be called by that name. After all, good eating is, like most other earthly good, only comparative; I have found as much enjoyment, or more, in eating the scrapings

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Masfield, *Sea Life in Nelson's time*, 1905, pp. 143-148.

of an empty butter firkin, handed to me out of the cabin, than any London alderman ever found in his bowl of turtle soup. . . . The ship was in the most filthy state, and swarmed with bugs. . . . Neither they nor any other insect ever annoyed me; still, my regular lodging-place was the hard deck, with the bed of a wine-cask for a pillow. I had no trouble dressing nor undressing, a shirt and a pair of trousers being all my clothing; I neither wore hat nor shoes.

“Our hardest work commenced at Madeira, where we took in from 3 to 500 pipes of wine. We had to unload, load, and keep the ship clear for sea at the same time. . . . When freight was plentiful in Madeira, our chests regularly took their stations upon the quarter-deck, which, if it was equally so in Jamaica, they never quitted during the remainder of the voyage. . . .

“No look-out at sea was ever pretended to be kept; it was a cant phrase with us, ‘Down to rest, and up to sleep.’ The mate generally coiled himself up on the hen-coop, and the rest of the watch took up the next best berth around him; so that he could give us a kick if suddenly wanted. When we drew near land, for which we were often looking for several days (there being then no chronometers, at least we had none), a look-out was then presumed to be kept, but it was only nominal. I have often in the night watches realised in my own person—

‘The sleeping sea-boy on the rocking mast.’

By seating myself upon the fore-topsail yard in as easy a position as the position would permit, and lashing myself with the gasket to the strap of the tye-block, I have taken a comfortable snooze until relieved.

“I have taken off my shirt when wet, wrung it, and put it on again. By going barefooted, I have often had my feet cracked to the bone, and have often been ready

to cry out . . . I did not go without [shoes] because I had them not; but because it was too much trouble to put them on. . . . Going barefoot up the rigging in warm weather required time to become habituated to it; but in cold weather it was always pinching. I have known the master, of a nasty blowy morning, when the wind was foul, as soon as he came upon deck, mount upon a chest-lid and look to windward; then grinning until he brought the two sides of his mouth nearly in contact with his ears, curse the wind and the weather; next he would vent his spite upon the masts and sails by carrying on as in bravado; and if anything gave way, we came in for our share of his abusive tongue. Otherwise when all went well with him, he was a quiet, easy-going personage, pacing the deck from morning to night, in an old pair of cut-down shoes, scarcely ever speaking a word; occasionally he was seen to smile, indicative of his meditations, or rather of his calculations, being profitable; but if we were not quick in our motions up aloft, he would keep us upon our mettle by abusive epithets."

Later Ellison relates an experience of impressment which might have had a most sinister ending. ". . . When I was mate of a vessel, lying in the same harbour [Kingston, Jamaica], all the men-of-war lying in Port Royal sent up their boats one afternoon for a general impressment. When the ship to which I belonged was boarded, the officer, finding only two boys and myself, which then comprised the whole of the crew, except the master, pressed me. I was taken on board the unfortunate *Hermione*, and there detained three days. Captain Pigott, being aware that he could not legally detain me,<sup>1</sup> sent for me every day, to induce me to enter the service, promising to take me on the quarter-deck, and give me

<sup>1</sup> Masters, mates and apprentices of merchant vessels were exempt from impressment.



speedy promotion. Happily I withstood the temptation, or I might have been murdered as an officer, or hung as a mutineer." [The notorious mutiny on the *Hermione* in 1797 was only the beginning of that ship's adventures. The mutineers gave her up to the Spaniards and it was not until 1799 that she was recaptured in an amazing and dashing "cutting-out" affair by Captain Hamilton in the *Surprise*. The *Hermione* was re-named the *Retribution*.]

Seacome Ellison also records a grim voyage when he was mate of a large armed ship, returning from Port-au-Prince. The master and second mate contracted yellow fever from which Ellison himself had barely recovered. The crew, after impressment, consisted of foreigners and boys. He begged the commodore of the convoy of merchant men for extra hands.

"I cannot," said that gentleman, "grant your request; for I cannot in conscience send men out of a healthy ship into a sickly one. You sail well; you must keep near me, and I will supply you with every requisite that your unfortunate situation may require: but to send men out of a healthy ship into a sickly one, I will not."

At first the surgeons from some of the large Jamaica ships paid them daily visits, but passengers became alarmed, and soon they were "shunned by the fleet as a pest." The master in his delirium tried to jump overboard. He refused to go below and lay covered with a sail, "rain or fair." One day, however, they were spoken by a Bristol ship, one of the convoy; an old lady was on board who knew the sick master well, and persuaded the captain of the Bristol ship to take him on board. Thus Ellison was left in command with a lame carpenter to share the watch. He brought the ship home, but, fever returning upon him at Holyhead, he hardly knew when he had reached Liverpool. Neither master, mate nor second mate could walk home, and no custom-house officer durst venture on board;

if the authorities had known the state of things the ship would have been forbidden entrance. Ellison recovered, but suffered acute pain in his chest for years after; the second mate died. Ellison returned later to Port-au-Prince as a Master Mariner. (He never uses the "courtesy" title of Captain.) After these strenuous years, when he was about thirty, he sailed from Liverpool for the Bay of Honduras in April 1803, in the brig *Rachel* of 240 tons burden, having 16 guns and 35 men; he was himself master and part owner. While they were lying in Honduras, all his best men ran away, or were pressed, and none were found to replace them. Ellison had to leave the Bay with only fourteen hands, including one worn-out master, carried for charity, and a man lame of both feet. They had on board one passenger, Lieutenant Prater of the Army. Ellison hardly ever speaks of his home, and only once of his ship, on her anxious last voyage. In bad weather, off the coast of America, he describes the *Rachel* as "seeming to mock the towering seas—riding, like the homeless petrel, over their proud heads" . . . and "the wearying annoyance of the working and cracking of the deep-laden, slender-built barque heightened by an almost continual clanking of pumps." When they drew near their own shores the brig had been literally under water for several weeks and the crew were so worn-out with constant fatigue that they had not strength to take advantage of the fine westerly winds "by setting proportionate sail." On 2nd December 1803, they were captured by the *Vaillant*, Captain Étienne, which mounted 30 guns, and had, at the beginning of her cruise, 300 men. Ellison went below and collected what he had of value.

"About twelve hours previously," he says, "I had been spoken by the *Sir Edward Hamilton*—(Shaw, master), a fast-sailing slaver, which had been taken a few hours before me. Some of her crew told Captain Étienne, that if he

would only keep his main-topsail to the mast for an hour or two longer, another prize would fall into his clutches; he took the advice given him, and I unfortunately ran into the toil." In the ward-room he found "Peter K——," who had been an officer in the *Sir Edward Hamilton*; they were destined to be companions for the next five years. "He was *tête-à-tête* with Major F——, giving an account of his great Scottish relatives; to which the Major, who was from the same side of the Tweed, was listening with marked attention. The long list he gave of noble families to which he claimed affinity, brought him into high favour, and obtained for him afterwards many a good dinner."

An American Master happened to come on board the *Vaillant*, and by his kindness Ellison was enabled to send a message to his friends at home. Captain Étienne was an honourable man, Ellison lost nothing except a pair of pistols and a quadrant. An excellent table was kept, at which the captured Masters were always guests. After the taking of a sixth prize, Captain Étienne sailed for Bordeaux, where most of the prisoners had friends. Mr. McCarthy, of the house of McCarthy *frères*, on whom Ellison had a letter of credit, offered to get him leave to remain in that town; but "not understanding the language, I preferred sharing the fate of my friends." It must have been some satisfaction to hear of the re-capture of the brig *Rachel*. They now began the journey of five or six hundred miles to Verdun. They were thirteen—five masters, and the rest mates. They arranged to hire baggage-carts and were well treated, paying for extra comforts, shared with the guards, and receiving on the whole civil treatment, in return for their own considerate behaviour. Ellison bought a pony and those who could afford it followed his example. And so, he arrived in good health and spirits at Verdun on January 28, 1804.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MEETING OF SEACOME ELLISON, EDWARD BOYS AND OTHERS. IMPRESSIONS OF VERDUN

It must be stated here that in 1803 and until 1809 General Wirion, Inspector-General of the Imperial gendarmerie, Officer of the Legion of Honour, was commander-in-chief of the prisoners of war at Verdun. Colonel Courcelles was commandant of the Department of La Meuse and of the Fortress of Verdun, and resided at the Citadel.

The narratives of the captives now touch closely at many points and in the following chapters an effort has been made to weave them into one.

"Being new stationed," Ellison writes, "where we were likely to remain for some time, my first enquiry was for my passenger P—. . . . I found him in company with Edward Boys (now a Commander in the R.N.) in a little brazier's shop. . . . They had met at Orleans on January 7 and marched together to Verdun, where they had just arrived. Their purses being exhausted, and having had no opportunity of replenishing them, they were reduced to their shifts, and were then sitting over a small fire, cooking their dinner, of which I was invited to partake; but my stomach not being used to such a poor *soupe-maigre*-looking repast, I declined the invitation, and proposed they should dine with me at a *restaurateur's* [restaurant];<sup>1</sup> this originated a friendship with Boys, which

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires de Madame la Duchesse D'Abrantiès*, Paris, 1785. Vol. I, p. 58. . . . *il ne serait pas entré chez un traiteur (tel était alors le nom qu'ils avaient); celui de restaurateur n'est venu que plusieurs années après.*

continues to the present time." Ellison, Boys, Lt. Prater and a *détenu* from Brighton messed together at first in a hired lodging. Later Ellison met Thomas Walbeoff Cecil, and though of very different dispositions, they formed a friendship which continued till Cecil's death. They took lodgings in the same house, and lived very happily together.

However, one of the masters made his escape, and all the rest "of his cloth," about 160, were shut up in the Citadel, where an old monastery became their dormitory. In one of the beds, each destined for two people, and placed in a long corridor, Ellison was able to secure K—— as a companion. Lamps, for which the prisoners had to pay, burned all night. "What with the shouting, the singing, the bewailing, the smoke of the lamps, and the consequent stench of the place, it was rendered almost unbearable. Bitche, the place of my subsequent confinement, called by some, the place of tears, was, with all its horrors, preferable to a great degree; for my mental sufferings were greater here than at any other time of my captivity. At the conclusion of three months, by dint of money, K—— and I obtained a small room in the *entresol*. . . . I could just stand upright with my hat on, under the beams; but it was a palace compared with the place we had left. We hired a stove and a bed each, had all our things brought from our lodgings, and in a few days made ourselves quite at home, our friends often coming in to cheer us in our confinement." After some time, the [English] commanding naval officer interfered, and they were restored to the privileges of the *dépôt*, "which," Ellison says, "were as great as we could reasonably desire. The country was open to us in every direction, within the range of six miles from the ramparts, and these were about six miles in circumference. . . . We might live in any part of the town we pleased, and had the liberty of

passing through the streets at all hours of the night." Hundreds of British subjects between the ages of nine and sixty were "detained" in France by Napoleon when war was renewed in 1803. Boys speaks of 400 English at Verdun when he arrived, and Ellison says the *détenus* included "Marquises, lords, baronets, honourables, knights and gentlemen of fortune. . . . All ranks met at the gaming tables; noble lords threw dice with base masters of merchantmen, as they deemed them; men of fame and men of *infame* [*sic*] were hand-in-glove, where in a well-lighted room stood a table, covered with *louis*, crowns, and half-crowns; where exciting wines and liquors of every description could be had for the asking, where fine, well-dressed abandoned women were invited and paid to attend; where an elegant supper was always prepared.

"Many of the *détenus* kept dashing establishments, having their mistresses dressed in the most expensive style . . . a number of boxes were taken for those females in the theatre, and likewise for the English ladies; and there it was that English gentlemen were seen passing from the one to the other, paying their compliments indifferently to all; or sometimes placed between a *dame comme il faut*, and a *dame comme il en faut*,<sup>1</sup> now turning their heads to, and talking to the one, now to the other . . . Drinking, gambling, and debauchery were the order of the day. . . . I once upbraided a Master for his idle habits, when he asked what I should have him to do? He could get drunk twice a day for fourpence, what could he do better? . . . Being always fearful of contracting idle habits, it was my constant custom to rise early in the morning, both in winter and summer, and walk out as soon as the gates were opened. . . . One morning, very opportunely, Napoleon passed my door as I was going out; I ran after

<sup>1</sup> The same expression is used by Lawrence in his book, *A Picture of Verdun, from the portfolio of a Détenu*, 1810. Vol. I, p. 135.

him to the posthouse, where he changed horses, and as he did not alight, I climbed up on the outside of a window exactly opposite his carriage, and had a very good view of him and his Empress Josephine; for some minutes there was nothing to interrupt the sight, till Wirion rode up and poked his head through the carriage window; but, as almost every word was accompanied by a bow, I occasionally got a glimpse over his head. Houselle, the draper, banker and army contractor, came running along in his nightcap, only half-dressed, vociferating as loud as the shortness of his breath would permit, 'Vive Napoléon! Vive l'Empereur!' but he was not joined by a single voice—indeed few of the inhabitants were stirring, and he was too late to pay his respects, for six heavy cart-like rope-harnessed, bridle-less horses, bore off majesty faster than the contractor could follow.

"I have often read that Napoleon was in continual dread of his life; but he then showed no indication of it; there was not a single armed man about the carriage, nor any attendant save his Mameluke, until Wirion rode up; until then, there was nothing to hinder me from addressing their Majesties, but timidity, or want of inclination."

The prisoners saw a great portion of the Grand Army as they passed on their direct route from Paris to Strasbourg. "Occasionally," Ellison says, "I have seen the poor fellows come in jaded at four or five in an afternoon, receive their rations in the street, lay down for a little while, and then continue their march. Other times we had troops from Spain, passing through in waggons pressed from the farmers, and going post-haste, night and day; . . . finest of all, a regiment of Polish lancers, grand and gay and all good-looking."

Boys found the Verdun crowd grim enough; but a mixture of high principles, good sense, courage and a young light heart, with a most faithful capacity for friendship,

carried him unspoilt through the five years of his captivity. He says that there were two good schools, one for young gentlemen, and both of great benefit to boys and to the steady seamen. He speaks briefly of various "allurements to iniquity," gambling being the most notorious; and is surprised that duelling was, on the whole, uncommon. One duel, however, he mentions: "Two mids, both under fourteen years of age, were found shooting at each other across a table in their lodging, and had to be forcibly parted."

Various mitigations were obtainable by permission or fines or bribes. Midshipmen had to sign a book at the *appel*, twice a day. They received every month from the senior officer half their pay less thirteen to twenty per cent., besides a monthly allowance from the French Government of twenty-five shillings, the same as that given to ensigns, warrant officers, and masters of merchant vessels. *Détenus* of military rank received the same pay as prisoners of war, civilians nothing. The needy civilians, however, received from the managers of the English patriotic fund something every month proportionate to their families; so that after the first year or so, there were very few that suffered, except from their own misconduct. This fund also provided for the schools at all the principal *dépôts*. Boys and his companions rambled about the country with a pointer and a silken net, and later, kept English greyhounds.

As to parole, "a direct violation of this engagement was so unreservedly condemned by all classes during the first five years of the war," that Boys says "only three were noted as so disgracing their country. Those who determined to depart generally committed an offence which would ensure the deprivation of parole, it being generally considered by us that the instant anyone was taken into custody by armed men, no matter from what



cause, parole ceased. Nor can this practice, where it produced actual imprisonment, be condemned, considering that the prisoners had no hope of exchange. Nevertheless it was not without its evils, for it became difficult to define the exact line of distinction between open violation and this alternative; to wit, an offence so trifling, but so exactly measured, was contrived, as to induce a *gendarme* to take the parties into custody and lodge them in the guard-room till he reported to the lieutenant. The prisoners then stepped out of the window, concealed themselves in the town till dark, and then departed." Boys thought this, not perhaps for *détenus*, but at any rate for prisoners of war, a bad augury, "honour being a delicate plant that often fails to mature if wounded in the bud."

We have already quoted some of Ellison's impressions of the place. His book was written with that touch of austerity often found in older seafaring men. Even in his youth he viewed the crowds of Verdun with slightly sardonic detachment; and his inflexible, fearless, and rather lonely, but generous and unselfish spirit, must have been a source of strength to his companions.

"Upon the whole," he says, "the prisoners lived happily together, willing away the time as unoccupied people generally do, fulfilling the proverb, 'when the d—l finds a man idle, he sets him to work'." Ellison grew weary of the life after two years, and spent most of his time in his own lodgings or walking out. A determination to go to Buenos Ayres, if he ever became free, set him to learn Spanish under a master; he found this a difficult task but mastered both that and the French language with time and perseverance. He describes the beauty of Verdun, as it was then; its trees and picturesque cathedral, and fine promenades, with extensive views over river and rich meadows, and lofty vine-covered hillsides. One shady

walk there was near a waterfall, "where the prisoner has sauntered about many a melancholy solitary hour, brooding over his apparently endless captivity. In one corner of the highest and most exposed parts of the ramparts, were regularly seen a few disconsolate shipmasters, pacing to and fro on a spot about the length of what their quarter-decks might have been; their wonted walk being marked out by the disappearance of grass, from constant pressure."

Ellison also says: "The account of the murder of Captain Wright in the Temple cast a greater gloom for the moment over us than any other thing. I saw one of his last letters—perhaps the very last he wrote—it was to his first Lieutenant Wallace [*i.e.* Lt. Wallis]; and I well recollect one expression recommending the midshipmen that had been taken with him to Captain Wallis's protection. Captain Wright said: 'Take care of my little admirals in embryo'."

The following quotation is from a letter written by Captain John Wesley Wright of H.M.S. sloop *Vincego*, not long before his death. This event was referred to by his English contemporaries as "murder," by the French as "suicide," and is described by Professor J. K. Laughton as "mysterious." In 1798 he and Sir Sidney Smith had contrived, with outside assistance, a cool and audacious escape, after two years' captivity in the Temple prison. In May 1804 he was once more a prisoner in the Temple. On 25th October he was found dead, with cut throat, in the cell where he was placed after an attempted escape. The manner of his death remains an enigma.

TOWER OF THE TEMPLE,  
*September 4, 1805.*

. . . I rejoice to hear, at length, that you are near those dear boys<sup>1</sup> on whose progress my whole solicitude at present centers;

<sup>1</sup> Two of them his own nephews.

give them my best wishes, and recall to their memory what has so often been pressed upon them,—I must have no idleness, no indecorous boyish tricks, no habits of riot or inebriety, no deviation from truth, no adoption of prejudice, no tendency to exaggeration, no indiscriminate censure or proscription *en masse*, but a liberal gentlemanly conduct, and a steady persevering assiduity, which will alone surmount the difficulties which are before them. Remind them often of their destination, and of the precious leisure they have but momentarily on their hands; let the main-spring of all their outward actions be the character of our dear country, and to repeat how much I expect from them. I am not unaware, my dear Wallis, that I am thus imposing a difficult task, and laying a heavy burden on you; but I am sure you undertake the one cheerfully, and will bear the other with patience.

Give my best respects to all my officers individually; I shall be glad to hear from any of them when they are in a scribbling mood. Pray give me an account, nominally, of all my people; having taken the liberty of making you a kind of foster-father to my little admirals in embryo, you must assume an air of gravity suitable to the serious occasion; and I must tell you, for the comfort of those who weep for my misfortunes, that I can bear them, however great or multiplied; but that I am less ill off than people at a distance, whose apprehensions multiply evil, are aware of—for I have, within a few months, had the felicity of procuring books, and subscribing to the *Moniteur*, the fables and prejudices of which I assure them, I am not in the least danger of adopting.

Now, fare you well, and believe me most faithfully and unfeignedly your friend. J. W. WRIGHT.

P.S.—Tell me particularly what all the boys are doing; tell them I continually think of their progress. Let no partiality, except what is naturally inspired by excellence or superior merit, be shown to one above another—for a favourite has no friend.

The *Tour du Temple* no longer exists; it was demolished under the Consulate.

## CHAPTER VI

### CAPTAIN JAHLEEL BRENTON'S CAPTIVITY IN FRANCE. 1803-1806

CAPTAIN JAHLEEL BRENTON was born in Rhode Island in 1770, came to England in 1780, and entered the Navy as midshipman in 1781. In the year 1800 he obtained command of H.M.S. *Minerve*, 38 guns. In the same year he married Miss Isabella Stewart. Both were children of distinguished loyalist families which had long been in America. During the revolutionary war Captain Brenton's parents had been forced to come to England, and had spent some time in France.

In March 1801, the Captain sailed for Spithead, where, on the day he arrived, orders were given to prepare for war. And that same day he had a serious accident; a block fell upon his head, and the severe wound caused concussion of the brain.

But war seemed inevitable, and the captain was restless and impatient to rejoin his ship. The doctor advised "the utmost tranquillity of mind and body," a difficult prescription. In May 1803, war was renewed with France, and the *Minerve* made many captures in the Channel. The Captain's state of mind now prevented further peaceful convalescence, and he returned to duty on his ship: "the exhilarating prospects of my profession bore me up."

Whilst employed in the blockade of the coasts of France, the *Minerve* went aground off Cherbourg during a thick fog. For nine hours a struggle was made to refloat her (and at last, to burn her), under heavy gun-fire from the batteries of the Fort. But in spite of the gallant efforts of his officers and crew, Captain Brenton had at length to

surrender to the enemy, with eleven men killed and sixteen wounded, and no prospect of saving his ship (3rd July 1803).

In a few days' time the order came for the prisoners to march to Épinal, capital of the department of the Vosges, and nearly five hundred miles distant. They had very little money in hand, and Captain Brenton's attempt to sell his gold watch (which had cost thirty-one guineas), proved disappointing. But a stranger asked if he might look at the watch and at once offered to take it in pledge for twenty-five *louis*. This generous soul was a M. Dubois of Lorient; and his name deserves to be recorded, for he presently returned to the Captain, saying: "Sir, I shall never forgive myself for having accepted a pledge from an officer suffering from the fortune of war. Take back the watch, and give me your note of hand." And once more he returned, saying "Monsieur, ma conscience me pique encore," and laid down twenty-five more *louis*, saying that he had in his purse enough for himself, until he should reach home.

Captain Brenton writes: "I am happy to say that in the course of this war very many instances occurred of great benevolence shown towards the British prisoners in France; and in these cases where they experienced harsh or cruel treatment, it almost always arose from military power having been obtained by men whose only recommendation was their bravery, and who had no kind feelings to temper it; but these instances were rare." He also preserved a charming long letter from M. Dubois (acknowledging the Captain's draft from England), and says that "his singular kindness and generosity alleviated the first bitterness of captivity for the Captain and crew of the *Minerve*."

Early on the 9th of July a last farewell was taken of "the poor old *Minerve*, lying dismantled in the harbour," and a day's march of fifteen miles brought the officers to

Valogne. The ship's company and marines were sent on a day's march ahead. The second night was spent at Carentan and the third brought the prisoners to St Lô. Here General Dellegorgue welcomed them and invited Captain Brenton and his first lieutenant to "an elegant little repast." When the other officers reached their billets, they were entertained to supper, the friends of each family assisting in the hospitalities which were continued till their guests left the town, having had all their expenses paid there.

On the 14th when all were ready to resume the march, the general embraced Captain Brenton warmly, wishing him a speedy release, and health and happiness. A young midshipman was heard to exclaim, "See, the French General kissing our Skipper!"

At Caen, Captain Brenton had reason to complain to the general of certain restrictions imposed during the march upon officers who had given their parole of honour. This general was the very reverse of the last, and replied "in a brutal manner."

"Je me moque de votre parole d'honneur. Je ne sais pas ce que c'est, moi."

To this Captain Brenton replied:

"I will describe it to you. It is 'with a British officer' stronger than any prison you have in France." But Captain Brenton also relates that when the officers' party left the coast, they were only accompanied by three very respectful *gendarmes*.

They reached Épinal on 12th August, where they found their unfortunate shipmates ragged and starving, and some sick in hospital. An English lady at Caen had offered Captain Brenton a note of credit to a banker and he had thankfully procured a loan of fifty *louis*. The French bankers, Mm. Perregaux Frères, treated Captain Brenton with great generosity and consideration throughout his

captivity, and, in answer to a letter written at Pontoise, they now arranged to honour the Captain's drafts and those of his officers. Three hundred *louis-d'or* were sent by them to St Denis, and an order for four hundred more at Épinal. There were cheers from the midshipmen when they heard of this handsome act. Next day the prisoners set out in every kind of carriage, but soon grew tired of driving at a walking pace and returned to marching on foot. The Captain himself never enjoyed better health.

His first act at Épinal was to place his young people in French families where they could not speak English and would keep regular and early hours and seldom be idle. Many of them had been sent to sea early with little education; they could now have the advantage of instruction from native masters. "Upon the approach of winter, the seamen and marines being unprovided with clothes or bedding, and placed upon a very slender diet, began to suffer severely. A little addition was made to their food by subscription among the officers, when they met, as they did every week, at Captain Brenton's lodgings for divine service; and through the same fund a quantity of old tapestry, from some of the ruined houses in the neighbourhood, belonging to the *ci-devant* nobility, was purchased as a covering for them at night."

In the middle of November, negotiations for an exchange had failed, and all were ordered to march to Phalsburg [Pfalzburg] 'a fortress on the Vosges Mountains, which was more secure for prisoners than the open town of Épinal.

Captain Brenton now watched his sailors march to Phalsburg. But for help given them by their officers and by some generous captains of merchant ships, many of them must have perished. At Rem<sup>1</sup> they were placed in a ruined and roofless chapel, with a little straw on the

<sup>1</sup> I have failed to locate Rem.

soaking pavement. Each man had his three *sols* (about three farthings) a day, and an allowance of bread. Many spent the money on spirits instead of meat. Captain Brenton requested the officer of the escort to place the seaman's money in his hands, and to this sum he added "from the subscription purse." One of the *gendarmes* was permitted to go on ahead to Lunéville, where he bought meat and vegetables and had them cooked. The prisoners on their arrival had, at least, a comfortable meal, and were confined in barracks.

"So orderly and well behaved were these poor fellows, and so obediently respectful in their march, even to the youngest midshipman as well as to their conductors, that upon their arrival at Sarrebourg, they were allowed to be billeted and quartered among the inhabitants in small parties, taking with them their respective portions of meat and vegetables, the inhabitants cheerfully finding them fire to cook it."

At Phalsburg the barracks were excellent; but the men were so ragged, and so lame from performing such a march barefoot, that wooden shoes or *sabots* at threepence a pair were sent in, but it was some time before the sailors would consent to put them on. The Mayor was most humane and benevolent, filled up the hospitals with the seamen, and tried in vain to procure clothing. Some old army blankets were produced.

Meantime Captain Brenton had written to the Admiralty requesting help for the distresses of the prisoners, and asking for a small daily sum to enable them to live. The answer was approval of the suggestion, and a credit for £2,000.

The prisoners were now ordered to Verdun. They numbered four hundred and were formed into three divisions. The officers and nearly one hundred seamen formed the first division, which was followed on two



successive days by the other two. The march began early in December. At Sarrebourg the people were confined in a place like the ruined building at Rem. Few, says Captain Brenton, could have survived a night spent there. However, while on his way to consult a magistrate, he saw a large house to let; and he was permitted to hire it, to pay for an extra night guard, and to give his parole that the hundred and fifty prisoners should not attempt to escape. Food was prepared, and large fires were lit in every room. A heap of straw was provided, and meat and soup were brought into the house in tubs.

"The joy and delight of the prisoners when they arrived at the sight of so much unexpected comfort, may be better conceived than described; tired, and perishing with cold and hunger, their food, their fire, and their straw, were indeed luxuries. . . . Fires under a proper watch were kept throughout the night, and daybreak found the poor men refreshed and grateful, ready to resume their march, in the most contented and willing state of discipline." Captain Brenton requested the magistrate to allow the other two divisions of prisoners to be treated in the same way, and he at once consented. A sum of money for rent, food, and fuel, etc. was left in his hands by the captain.

The first division marched from Sarrebourg to Lunéville, Nancy and St Michel<sup>1</sup> [St Mihiel] and Verdun, and were joined there by the other divisions.

Here, says Captain Brenton, "The people were allowed to repose for some days, previous to their continuing their march to their destined *dépôt*, Givet, on the banks of the Meuse; and this time was taken advantage of, in clothing the prisoners from head to foot, in a warm and substantial manner, and in providing them with blankets. In the

<sup>1</sup> Almost certainly St Mihiel, marked on all the old maps; whereas Mt. St Michael, near Toul, has been seen only on modern maps.

course of a week they proceeded on their route, but having none of the officers to superintend their conduct, and watch over them, they were soon again involved in misery. A large part of their clothes were disposed of for the merest trifle to provide for their wants. So true it is, that seamen even of experience, and of sterling abilities in the exercise of their profession, are but children of a larger growth when on shore. . . . Hence it is also that officers, whilst their men are under their command on board ship, are obliged to keep lists of every article of their clothing, and to call them to a rigid account when any of them are missing. The consequence of the separation of these men from their officers in this case, was that when they arrived at Givet, after a march of five or six days from Verdun, they were again in a state of destitution.

"The officers were in the meantime permanently settled in Verdun, to which place all the English *détenus*, from every part of France, were assembled; forming, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary groups of character, that had ever been assembled in the same spot."

Early in January a letter came from one of the seamen at Charlemont, the fortress of Givet, imploring Captain Brenton to visit them in their misery. This he was permitted to do; being on parole, and taking, at his own suggestion, a *gendarme* in his carriage. In a long letter to the Transport Board in England (25th January, 1804), Captain Brenton describes the condition of those prisoners; the measures taken to provide them with extra blankets, cooking utensils and the regulations as to food, and proper care of clothing, etc. (A clerk of the *Minerve* was left as superintendent, but he proved later, it appears, unworthy of his trust.) On his return to Verdun Captain Brenton found that Captain Gower of the *Shannon* had arrived there. This gentleman set out at once for Valenciennes to see to the wants of his own ship's people, Captain

Brenton having given him a letter of credit on Messrs. Perregaux Frères for £400, to be used for this purpose.

Captain Brenton planned and later made a visit to the seamen imprisoned at Bitche [Bitsche], and clothed fifty left in hospital at Phalsburg. He also helped various commissioned and petty officers who were in distress, and masters of merchantmen. He visited the hospitals in Metz, Nancy, Lunéville, Blemont [Blamont] and Phalsburg.

Captain Brenton warmly praises Monsieur Parmentier, the mayor of Phalsburg, and also the surgeon of the hospital there, for their great kindness and benevolence to the prisoners. He wrote to the Transport Board requesting that a relative of the mayor's, then imprisoned in England, might be liberated as an expression of gratitude.

All efforts to effect an exchange having proved unavailing, in the spring of 1805, Captain Brenton, resigned to his fate, decided to arrange for his wife and child to join him. From that moment, he says, he no longer gave his captivity a thought, but counted the days till the travellers started. This was early in 1805, and Mrs. Brenton had, to accompany her, a sister who spoke French. They travelled with ease.

A lodging was taken at "Charni" [Charny], a small village two miles from Verdun, in a spacious mansion belonging to a noble French family. So the last year of Captain Brenton's captivity was passed in contentment, the only drawback being his own continued ill-health. There was a menace of lung trouble, but he contrived to conceal the more serious symptoms from his wife. In order to re-establish his health, the Captain obtained permission to remove to the milder climate of Tours. On the journey thither, he met Lord Elgin at Melun, where he was a *détenu*, and where he showed great generosity and benevolence to his distressed countrymen. From this

gentleman, on 4th November, 1805, Captain Brenton received authentic reports of the battle of Trafalgar and also a rumour of Lord Nelson's death. This news was confirmed at Orléans.

In September Captain Brenton describes a day spent in "great delight in rambling over the beautiful grounds of Chanteloup, and visiting the castle of Amboise. Our darling children (one born in Tours) were in high health, and my own health in a great measure restored, we were in possession of everything to make us happy and grateful. The autumn was delightful, and we were under no restraint as prisoners, but permitted to make excursions to every part of the district. Our society was small and friendly." In November they removed to Tours itself and prepared to pass the winter comfortably. The renewed hopes of an exchange had subsided, although Lord Elgin, General Abercrombie, Captain Gower and others had been liberated. But Captain Brenton seems to have entertained private fears that the prisoners were now to be treated more rigorously.

"I was under the influence of these feelings, when one morning returning home I found my beloved Isabella in tears, and much agitated; she told me a *gendarme* had been in pursuit of me, requiring my immediate attendance before the General. The visit of a *gendarme* rarely boded anything favourable towards a prisoner. I, however, endeavoured to preserve my tranquillity. . . . I hastened to the General . . . but to my surprise and joy, was received with great cordiality, and these unexpected words: "*Monsieur, vous n'êtes plus prisonnier—Je vous en félicite.*"

Through the peculiar kindness of the Minister of Marine, M. Decrès, Dr. Grey and his family had been permitted to join the Brentons at Tours, and their names were now included in Captain Brenton's passport. Messrs.

Perregaux sent warm congratulations, and an order for £100 to prevent delay.

At Lamballe, on the evening of 20th December, they were told that a detachment of English prisoners had arrived; and at dawn next day, the Captain hailed them with "Yo ho! shipmates!" One of those unfortunates exclaimed, "If I did not dream, I was just drinking a pot of porter!"

The Captain gave each a small sum out of the hundred pounds. On the road to St Brieux, a "detachment of unfortunate bluejackets" were likewise relieved, and the seamen gave the Brenton party three cheers before they themselves resumed their melancholy journey. And again, that evening at table d'hôte in the hotel at St Brieux, a party of English officers on parole were present, and Captain Brenton was able to give to each of these prisoners the means of travelling in comparative comfort. So, to the end of his own happier captivity, the Captain tried to help the others. But before he left Verdun the French government had declared that each nation must support the enemy prisoners within its country, and Captain Brenton had been obliged to settle his affairs with regard to the prisoners and had to close his accounts.

The returning party reached England on 29th December, 1806, Captain Brenton having begun his imprisonment on 3rd July, 1803. They sailed in a small French brig, in a heavy sea, and landed at Dartmouth. Six men captured in the *Minerve* who had escaped to England were collected, and a court martial held on board the *Gladiator* in Portsmouth Harbour; it resulted in the honourable acquittal of Captain Brenton. On 10th February, he took command of the *Spartan*, then under orders to sail, weather permitting, with the East India convoy. In a private journal he notes that he left his "beloved Isabella" five days before the birth of a second son.

He had a distinguished career before him. In the

*Spartan*, 46 guns, 258 men, he gained a brilliant and single-handed victory over a Franco-Neapolitan squadron. In 1810 he was desperately wounded. He was made a Baronet in 1812 and K.C.B. in 1815. He was Resident Commissioner at the Cape of Good Hope, and later Lt.-Governor of Greenwich Hospital. He died (a Vice-Admiral of the White) in 1844.

Amid those grim days, the story of Captain Brenton's idyllic years with his wife and children in France is worth preserving, for its sunshine happiness, snatched from powers of darkness and strife.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER VII

### ESCAPE FROM VERDUN OF MIDSHIPMEN THOMAS WALBEOFF CECIL, JAMES ROBERT GORDON, AND [—] MAXWELL. 1807.

ELLISON says that "in the summer of 1809, Cecil, a bold open-hearted, generous fellow, who had been my chief companion, became unhappy at losing so much of his time. Disease and disappointment sensibly affected his disposition, which was naturally irritable, though at the same time, engaging; for if ever he gave offence by an unguarded word, he was always ready to acknowledge his fault. He carried himself high, to those who, he thought, assumed an unbecoming consequence, and on the other hand, was kind and condescending to those who met him in a friendly manner; and he had a ready way of conciliating all around him. Often, while musing, he

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Henry Raikes, *Memoir of Vice-Admiral Sir Jahleel Brenton, K.C.B.*, 1846.

would regret his descent (for he came of noble family). . . . His father had been improvident, and his last words to him were, "Remember, Tom, thou wast born a gentleman." Poor Cecil never forgot this, and it was all his patrimony.

"One evening, as Cecil was taking his solitary walk upon the *digue* in Verdun, he picked up a deserted infant and brought it to the lodgings [which he shared with Ellison]. Cecil nursed the baby till morning, when he took it to the hospital; and the matron was so pleased with his conduct that she invited him to the christening; and, by way of doing him honour, it was named after him. He was partial to company, and I often went to bed before he came home. One night he was later than usual, and being unwell, he came into my room with a rueful countenance, saying:

'O Ellison, give me a share of your bed, for the cat has kittened in mine.'

'Well then,' I replied, 'Go and nurse them, Cecil, as you did the baby, for I cannot sleep two in a bed!'"

A few days after this incident Ellison had, he says, "to take physic for his squeamishness." General Wirion ordered all masters of merchantmen to be shut up in the Citadel, and there were no single beds provided there.

"Once Cecil said to me, 'Ellison, bad as we are off here, very likely it may be the happiest part of our lives'; and, as regarded himself, he spoke prophetically. 'Still, I am determined' he said, 'to remain here no longer than I can, with credit to myself, forfeit my parole'; and immediately he began to devise means to get into close confinement when, as far as his honour was concerned, he would be a free man.

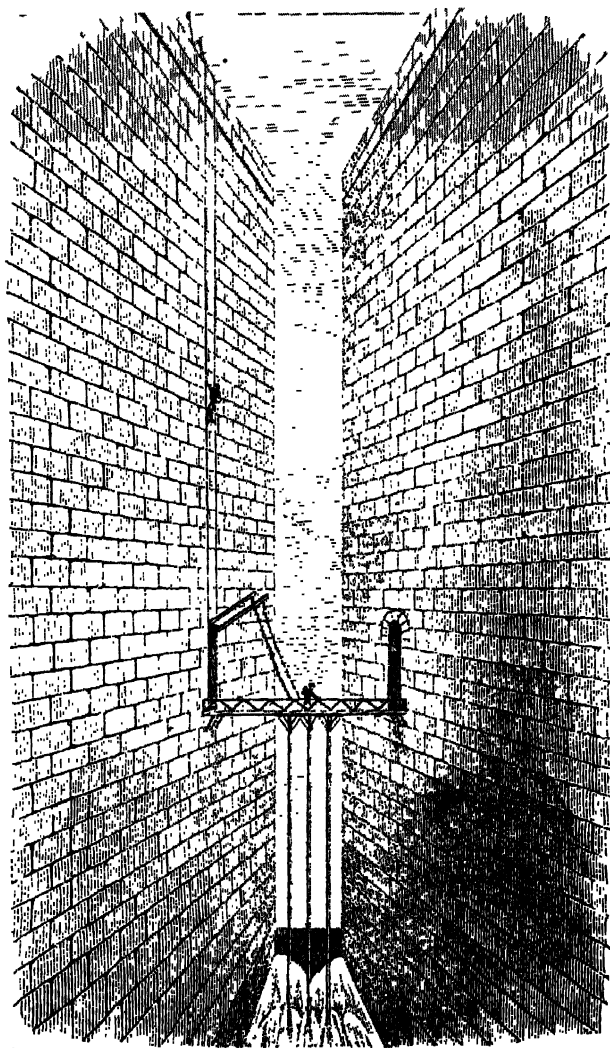
"My principal reason for not joining him was the fear of our being separated, if the plan did not succeed, be-



The Tower of Liverpool, 1680

*From an Engraving in the Liverpool Art Gallery*





Descent from Rampart

*See page 77*

cause from Wirion's known hatred to my cloth,<sup>1</sup> I was likely to receive the greatest share of the punishment; besides my mind was not quite made up for the enterprise, and Boys was not prepared: therefore he determined to go alone, an undertaking which none but a first-class spirit would have the courage to attempt."

Boys says that "our mutual and worthy friend, Ellison, furnished Cecil with the necessary cash," and . . . a brother officer named midshipman Gordon, of the *Hussar* frigate, consented to join him.

"Two of us walked out every day, and in the centre of a large wood, about five miles North of Verdun, concealed provisions, maps and clothing. Cecil and Gordon, in order to divest themselves of parole, went to the theatre and behaved ill, when they were arrested and confined in the guard-house; but disdaining to take advantage of a place not considered a prison, they waited till they were locked up in the *cachot* of the citadel; the night passed without being able to effect their object. The next morning they were unexpectedly marched off, with three others, under a strong escort, for Bitche."

Ellison says, "When I bade him a melancholy adieu, Cecil said, "Never fear, if anything like a favourable chance occurs, these fellows shall not take me to Bitche!"

Bitche, termed by the prisoners "The Castle of Tears," was a *dépôt* for punishment, a strong fortress in the department of the Lower Rhine about ten leagues north of Strasbourg, in the midst of a valley, built upon an immense rock, about one thousand feet above sea-level, having numerous subterranean caves, bomb-proof. . . . "Here was congregated the refuse of the other *dépôts* and many determined prison-breakers."

<sup>1</sup> "In fact he hated our cloth because taking us as a body, we were poor, he could not squeeze much out of us. It has been said of him 'that he tormented the rich for his profit, and the poor for his pleasure'." Ellison, p. 23.

Ellison and Boys, on the look-out, joined the party, and walked with them about six miles; when arrangements were made for a rendezvous in the woods, should they be able to overpower or evade the guards within a certain distance of Verdun.

"The next morning an express arrived of their escape." On the opening of the gates, in the morning of the third day, Ellison and Boys hastened out to the rendezvous, and "to their inexpressible joy there found their friends, accompanied by a youngster named Maxwell<sup>1</sup> who was exhausted by fatigue. Cecil related that about an hour after we left them, the guard was relieved . . . between Verdun and Metz, but owing to some mistake, there arrived only one *gendarme* to take charge of five prisoners, whom, the better to secure, he placed in the cart with the luggage; until the ascending a steep hill afforded Cecil, Gordon and Maxwell the pretext to alight, to relieve the horse; their intentions having been previously communicated to the other two, that all might decamp together: the two declined; the other three, watching the opportunity, bolted across a ploughed field, for a wood, distant about five hundred yards; the *gendarme* immediately discharged his pistols at them, but durst not pursue. They gained the wood in safety, with the loss of one of Maxwell's shoes. On the arrival of the cart at the first village, the whole male population were armed, and despatched to scour the woods; frequently, during the day, did some of these fellows pass within a few yards of them, but the thick foliage afforded protection. In this state of panting anxiety, they continued till dark, when they debouched and directed their steps to the appointed rendezvous; but, purposely avoiding roads they missed their way, and their progress during the night was slow.

"At dawn of day, there being no wood near, they con-

<sup>1</sup> See *Boys' Narrative*, page 24.

cealed themselves in a corn-field; the sun pouring his burning rays full upon them, with scarcely a breath of wind, and no water, they suffered severely. In the afternoon they were surprised by a peasant, who roughly ordered them out of his corn, when, faltering an excuse, they mildly tendered a remuneration for the damage they had done; this so moved him with compassion, that he immediately offered to supply them with provisions and wine, and told them he knew they were the Englishmen everybody was seeking, but: 'Fear not me,' he said, 'I will protect you and will not betray you.' They begged for water: 'Lie still,' said he, 'until all is dark, and then I will bring you both meat and drink'.

"In the meantime, Cecil watched . . . and in about an hour, observed him returning with the promised bread and wine, which soon revived them. 'Now,' said he, 'get up, and I will direct you in any way you choose to go.' Just as they were about to separate, this good Samaritan, casting his eyes once more upon the thankful group, perceived that Maxwell had lost a shoe, he instantly took off one of his own, adding, 'Here, my child, you shall not want a shoe whilst I have two'; nor could he be prevailed on to accept more than a trifle for his services, and thought nothing of the usual reward for captured prisoners. Soon after, heartily wishing them success, he left them.

"After much congratulation" says Ellison, "and hearty shaking of hands, we wrote a list of all they wanted, and hastened back to the *appel*. Then going round to our friends in whom we could place confidence, we related their adventures and collected for them about twenty *louis*. I went to my shoemaker's with the measure of Maxwell's foot, chose a pair of shoes, and told the man to put plenty of nails in them: 'O,' says he, with a knowing look, 'I suppose to run away in'.

"You have nothing to do with that," I replied, "obey your orders, and I will return in an hour." At the hour appointed they were ready, I gave him his price, and nothing more passed. Having obtained all they were in want of, and having provided a stock of eatables, and plenty of wine, we hired a vehicle, and, accompanied by four others, rejoined our emancipated countrymen early in the afternoon, the remainder of which was spent in high glee. When the wine began to operate, a proposal was made to drink a bumper to the peasant's health out of his shoe. This was unanimously adopted, and he who drank first did him the greatest honour, tasting the richest flavour of the worthy foot it had once covered."

Boys says it was unanimously resolved to fill the dirty shoe with silver, and return it to the peasant. But he was not to be found, so the shoe was produced at parties "in testimony of a generous soul" for months afterwards and might easily have been filled with gold.

"We left them about seven in high spirits. . . . We were scarcely out of the wood when we met Wirion and his wife, but being within the limits, and having sufficient time to enter our prison house before the shutting of the gates, we had nothing to fear, all that passed was a mutual salute.

"In about a month I had the pleasure of hearing from Cecil at Salsburg, giving me the leading particulars of his journey. A few days after their departure he and Gordon differed; they were both high-spirited, but the latter had not the noble mind of the former. He was of singular habits, very neat in his person, and very consequential, so that he generally went by the name of Lord George. Cecil took a different route, and they parted. One recollected that he owed the other a *louis*, which he tendered; but the lender, though poor, supposed the borrower still poorer, and thought it dishonourable to accept payment

under the then circumstances and therefore refused it. What was to be done? The one was too lofty to take it back, the other too proud to be under an obligation. The borrower put it on a stone in the middle of the road, and thus their proud spirits left it, although they had to accomplish a march of hundreds of miles, a great part of it through an enemy's country, with the dreary prospect of wanting the common necessities of life, a fair specimen of the folly and weakness of mankind."

Boys remarks that Maxwell, young and inexperienced and indebted to both, also refused to touch the money.

"Cecil continued in the route he first determined on, to Trieste, but by keeping to the North, he made a great angle. He passed the Rhine about Worms; then entering the town of Wurzburg [Würzburg], he had the good fortune to obtain a passport to Salzburg, which passport he enclosed to me, thinking it might prove serviceable if I ever followed his track. . . ."

Gordon and Maxwell marched through Prussia, and reached England by the North Sea, and all met accidentally in November 1807 in a London coffee-house. Gordon refused to shake Cecil by the hand, the quarrel was renewed, and both were bound over to keep the peace. Gordon, being promoted a few days after, again challenged Cecil, who met him, and fired in the air. This so overcame Gordon, that he dashed his pistol to the ground, apologised, and accused himself as author of all their disputes. "He subsequently volunteered to ship the turban," Boys goes on to say, "and find out the source of the Nile. This quixotic scheme, undertaken *alone*, in despair of getting afloat, and in utter ignorance of the obstacles, or the means of surmounting them, was almost certain of failure . . . for it was morally certain that he would perish, and he did perish." Another friend gives an account of Robert James Gordon's naval career subsequent to his escape,

noting that he was made Commander in June 1814. He died during his perilous expedition in September 1822 when "a day's journey from Sennar in Africa." Before he left the Mediterranean Captain Gordon had made himself acquainted with Hebrew, Arabic and Persian. He travelled in disguise.<sup>1</sup>

Cecil was also promoted in December 1807. But in 1814 he became involved in another duel, with Captain Stackpole, an officer reputed to be able to knock a fowl's head off with a pistol at twelve paces. This meeting was due to the thoughtless gossip of a midshipman who repeated an idle phrase of Cecil's spoken in 1811. No serious insult was intended, but Captain Stackpole refused a verbal apology and Cecil would not give a written one. He said that if any other officer in His Majesty's Navy had required it he would not have objected, but to apologize to Captain Stackpole was impossible. Cecil knew he would be stigmatised as a coward and become a jest and by-word in the service, if he refused a challenge from this famous duellist. They fought, and Cecil's opponent fell.

Shortly after this melancholy event he was made Commander. "But worldly honours," Boys writes, "had no longer any charms for one who felt he had slain his fellow-creature; he mourned, he repined in silence; till, at length, inconsolable and unable to bear up against the poignant anguish of this deep affliction, he fell a victim to his own sensibilities."

<sup>1</sup> *O'Brien's Adventures*, Vol. I, p. 23.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ESCAPE FROM VALENCIENNES OF MIDSHIP- MEN EDWARD BOYS, FREDERICK WHITEHURST, ROBERT HUNTER, AND WILLIAM MANSELL

1808-9

NEGOTIATIONS for an exchange of prisoners were attempted, but failed, and their fate seemed more endless and hopeless than ever. This cruel plight led to violation of parole, producing a decree condemning to the galleys all who should be retaken. In July 1808 three midshipmen were taken in the act of escaping; and Boys, although "he blushes" for the cause, says that the circumstance changed the destiny of the others and caused their "removal from a scene of dissipation, extortion and roguery and vice." One hundred and forty-two midshipmen, "*très-mauvais sujets*," were arrested and sent to the citadel. General Wirion declared that the whole class required extreme rigour and close confinement; Verdun was inadequate to their security.

Tradespeople flocked to the gates of the citadel trying to collect debts from inaccessible debtors. "The monastery was now crammed with such motley groups of gamblers quarrelling, debtors exulting, and Romeos despairing that the scene was truly entertaining; particularly to those who, having no regrets, were looking forward to an opportunity of proving that parole alone had enchained them so many years."

At daybreak, a drum summoned them to muster in two ranks, seventy-three for Valenciennes and Givet, and sixty-nine (mostly masters of merchant vessels) for Sarrelouis and other *dépôts*. The expedition of midshipmen



set out in waggons, upon bundles of straw, closely guarded by horse and foot *gendarmérie*.

We are now introduced to Midshipman Moyses, "the most intimate friend" of Boys. His name appears later in the story. Those two determined "to decamp." Their combined wits were fertile in desperate schemes, but all were frustrated by the vigilance of the guards who, when dinner was announced, were kept in good humour by being invited to partake of it. "We endeavoured to tempt them," Boys says, "to a free use of the bottle, but French soldiers are not generally addicted to the destructive vice of drunkenness."

Napoleon caused a list of all who escaped to be published, as having broken parole; in which Boys says he had the honour, later, to be included. He begs his readers to judge of the truth or falsehood of the accusation. But, as Ellison remarked, "neither the fear of being shot, or sent to the galleys, deterred them; the greater the dangers, the more the spirits of the prisoners were roused to face them." Moyses was a partner after his friend's heart; firm and resolute and watchful, he readily found a remedy for every obstacle, and was fearless in the face of danger. But, except that one jailer gave them a map, they had no luck, and were finally separated, Moyses being sent to Givet.

Boys was permitted to visit some English seamen at Avesnes, wounded in an attempted escape. He gave them money raised among the midshipmen. Later on, the prisoners met a gang of English seamen, half-naked, chained and hand-cuffed. "We made a subscription for them, and the poor fellows, with hearts of oak, not to be subdued, gave us three cheers, adding—"Never mind, gentlemen, we'll catch 'em again off Trafalgar, some of these days!"

Valenciennes was reached on 17th August, 1808, and the prisoners placed in the Citadel with 400 men. Here it

was intended that they should exist during the war, and no distinction was to be made between those "*très-mauvais sujets*" and the seamen, except the permission to walk on the rampart facing the town. Colonel Du Croix Aubert, in command, was "rigid in duty, exercised no tyranny, granted no favours, and was guilty of no extortions." The position seemed impregnable.

A wild plan now occupied the teeming brain of Boys. He planned to escape through the sally-port, and swim across the river, his clothes and belongings being placed in an oil-skin<sup>1</sup> umbrella, treated previously with beeswax and tallow. He declared that he had tested this method once before a crowd at Verdun, until stopped by authority. He said he could tow a fairly heavy weight, with a line between his teeth; also that a second person, unable to swim, could be towed at the same time holding steadily by the ferrule at arm's length. No brother midshipman could be found to join him. One bold spirit, Robert Hunter, after having agreed, declined at the last moment. Boys became quite frantic, and whispers of his intentions somehow reached the gendarmes; he was closely watched and an extra sentinel was placed at the sally-port. To avert suspicion, Boys therefore sent to Verdun for his clothes and his dogs, and began the study of Spanish. But he went on scheming, and a midshipman named Rochfort agreed to join him. Two others, Ricketts and Cadell, gave help and wise and prudent advice. A friendly *détenu* in the town procured provisions and a map; and skipping-ropes were bought from little boys and brought in openly from time to time. After deliberate discussion a fresh plan was made, involving much risk. Then Rochfort, the partner, fell seriously ill, and the attempt had to be abandoned, though Boys had been strutting about for some days, sure of soon being in England.

<sup>1</sup> See *Peter Simple*, 1838, p. 160.

It was known in the fortress that two escaping sailors from Bitche had been caught and slain, and Boys had heard of the attempted escape of two prisoners at Givet.

In the beginning of November, two sailors were sparring in the yard of the fortress at Valenciennes, when a young sentinel, thinking they were quarrelling attacked them with the butt-end of his musket. A mob at once collected; the guard was called out and attacked the English sailors. Whitehurst and Boys, indignant observers, pushed in to try and prevent bloodshed. The *Maréchal de logis* then desired the two midshipmen to send the seamen to their rooms. The order was given and immediately obeyed. Next morning Boys and Whitehurst were arrested, confined, and kept upon bread and water. They learned secretly that a report had been forwarded by the Commandant to the Minister of War, representing them as *chefs de complot*, the punishment for which was death. A respectful appeal to the justice of Colonel Du Croix Aubert, the Commandant, combined with the evidence of the *Maréchal de logis*, released the two prisoners.

"I mention this circumstance," says Boys, "not only to show the justice of the Commandant whom notwithstanding his strictness we all respected, but because it produced a proposition on the part of Whitehurst to attempt escape. . . . I eagerly embraced his proposal; and, although I knew that from his inexperience in the management of small craft, his assistance could not be great in the event of his getting afloat, I was perfectly convinced of his willingness and resolution." Five other midshipmen refused to go, believing escape to be possible only by bribery. Ricketts then proposed Hunter, who agreed to join the party and appeared firm and cordial. Whitehurst told the secret to a young midshipman, named Mansell, a delicate and high-spirited youth of about eighteen years, who was eager to join; Boys thought him

unfit to endure hardship and privation, but consented in the end.

The fortifications had now to be examined, and hearing there were wild rabbits about, Boys offered his greyhounds to the *gendarmes*. The *Maréchal de logis* was also pleased to hunt with the beautiful English dogs. They, however, would only follow their master, so he too was of the party, and Hunter and Whitehurst were allowed to join. Few rabbits were found, and none killed, but convincing observations were made.

"The difficulties to be encountered were these: to scale a wall, to ascend the parapet unseen, to escape the observation of three or four sentinels and the *patroles* [*patrouilles*]<sup>1</sup> to descend two ramparts, of about forty-five feet each, to force two large locks; and to get over two drawbridges. These were not more than we expected, and we, therefore, prepared accordingly."

The night of November fifteenth was fixed for the attempt. McIntosh, the good *détenu*, got iron handles fixed to a pair of boat-hooks which were intended for use as pick-locks. The rope of the midshipmen's well being defective, a new one was bought by subscription and devoted to the escape. Everything was now ready, the spirits and provisions in the knapsacks being concealed in the dog-kennel. At half-past eleven that night they bade farewell to their messmates, who begged them, even then, to desist from madness and destruction. They did indeed persuade the party to wait, as the night was calm and starlit. So, at length, the well-rope was reluctantly replaced, and the knapsacks given to the care of the greyhounds.

At half-past seven next night, 16th November, 1808, the four again assembled, each provided with a clasp-knife, and a paper of fine pepper, "on which we placed

<sup>1</sup> Spelling of French words as used in narratives by prisoners is kept.

our chief dependence. . . . It was now blowing very fresh, and was so dark and cloudy that not a star could be seen; the leaves were falling in abundance, and, as they were blown over the stones, kept up a rustling noise, particularly favourable to the enterprise." They then took leave of half-a-dozen brother officers and friends, including Rochfort and Robinson (who afterwards escaped also) and proposed that any who wished to follow should leave an interval of four hours after their party had left. A letter was given to Ricketts, to be dropped on the following day. It thanked the Commander for his civilities, and pointed out that if he wished to detain British officers, "the most effectual method was not locks, bolts and fortresses, but to put them upon their 'honour'; for that alone was the bond which had enchained us for more than five years."

Finally Boys and Hunter stole forth, woollen socks over their shoes, each carrying a rope, a small poker or stake and knapsack, to begin their march to the sea. For their aim was to range the coast to Breskins, in the island of Cadsand, opposite Flushing; and if they could not get afloat otherwise, to embark in the passage boat for Flushing, and about mid-channel, rise and seize the vessel. The plan now was for these two to go first, fix the rope, and open the doors, while, a quarter of an hour later, Whitehurst and Mansell were to follow. If two in front were shot, two following would be in safety: if two behind were discovered, two in front would hope to gain the country during the alarm. Rochfort, still only convalescent, helped them over the first wall. Crossing the road, they climbed silently on hands and knees up the bank, lying perfectly still as the sentinels approached, and, as they receded, again advancing, until the parapet over the gateway was reached, leading to the upper Citadel. Here the breastwork was about five feet high

and fourteen thick; and this being the highest part of the Citadel, they were in danger of being seen by the sentinels below; but the cold, bleak wind had tempted some to the shelter of their boxes. Cautiously they crept upon the summit, and down the breastwork towards the outer edge of the rampart, while cries, every fifteen minutes, of "*Sentinelle, prenez garde à vous,*" if unpleasant, were reassuring.

"Then," says Boys, "I forced the poker into the earth, and by rising and falling with nearly my whole weight, hammered it down with my chest; about two feet behind, I did the same with the stake, then slipt the eye of the well-rope over the head of the poker, and fastened a small line from the upper part of the poker to the lower part of the stake. This done, we gently let the rope down, through one of the grooves of the rampart, which receives a beam of the drawbridge when up. I then cautiously descended this half-chimney, as it were, by the rope; when I had reached about two-thirds of the way down, part of a brick fell, struck against the side and rebounded against my chest, this I luckily caught between my knees and carried down without noise. I crossed the bridge, and waited for Hunter, who descended with equal care and silence. We then entered the *ravelin*, proceeded through the arched passage forming an obtuse angle with a massive door leading to the upper citadel, but all efforts to pick, break or file the lock of a massive door proved vain.

"It now appeared complete checkmate (see Fig. 2); and it was proposed, as a last resource, to return to the bridge, slip down the piles, and float along the canal on our backs, there being too little water to swim and too much mud to ford it. Hunter, with the most deliberate coolness, proposed to get up the rope again and try some other part of the fortress."

Finally they decided to undermine the gate, with pocket-knives and hands. In about a quarter of an hour distant sounds were heard, like the report of a gun, and the cautious opening of a gate . . . then the fancied footsteps of a body of men. During an awful pause, thoughts of the murders at Bitche thronged into the mind of Boys, until a sudden glow of desperate determination encouraged him to succeed, or perish. Again, footsteps were heard, but a whisper of "Boys" "created a sudden transition from despair to serenity and a conviction of success, so that, in an instant, all was hope and joy." Reinforced by two friends, they now turned cheerfully to the "mining", "as though already embarked for England." The noise, it seems, was made by the fall of Mansell's knapsack; he could not carry it down the rope, and it slipped from Whitehurst's grasp, with an alarming echoing sound. Three continued at work, and by half past ten the first stone was raised, in twenty more minutes a second stone; and about eleven o'clock, the miners crept beneath the door.

"The drawbridge was up; but there was sufficient space between it and the door to allow us to climb up, and, the drawbridge being square, there was, of course, an opening under the arch: through this we crept, lowered ourselves with the second rope, which we passed round the chain of the bridge, and, keeping both parts, landed on the *garde-fous*." (These are two iron bars, one above the other, suspended by chains on each side of the bridge, and when down, serving the purpose of handrails.) "Had these bars been taken away escape would have been impossible; there being not sufficient rope for descending into the ditch. By keeping both parts of it in our hands, the last man was enabled to bring it away; otherwise four ropes would have been necessary." The second door through an arched passage, was actually unlocked—a joyful relief.

The drawbridge was up, but did not detain them for long; they got over, crossed the ditch upon the *garde-fous* as before, and landed in the upper citadel. Proceeding "to the North East Curtain," they fixed the stake and fastened the rope upon the breastwork for the fourth descent. As Boys was getting down, the stake gave way; Whitehurst, sitting by, snatched hold of the rope, and Mansell clutched Whitehurst's coat, and Boys, catching at the grass, was saved a fall of about fifty feet. Fortune had placed a solitary tree in the citadel; from this a second stake was cut, and the rope doubly secured as before. All descended safely with knapsacks, except Whitehurst, who got into a horizontal position two-thirds of the way down. "Seeing his danger," says Boys, "I seized the rope, and placed myself in rather an inclined posture under him; he fell upon my arms and shoulder with a violent shock; fortunately neither of us were hurt" (Whitehurst was tall and heavy); "but it is somewhat remarkable, that within the lapse of a few minutes we preserved each other from probable destruction."

And now, after nearly four hours of perilous and strenuous toil, all shook hands in an excess of joy.

Having put their knapsacks a little in order, they began a stealthy tramp, which at sudden panics became a gallop, through a long, sleeping village, and onward; till, reaching the little town of St Amand, they drank at the pump in the square, and, directing their course by the North Star, passed through without seeing a creature.

About an hour after, four stout fellows rushed out from behind a hedge, but each midshipman seized his pepper and his knife, and "spoke in haughty tones of defiance, with whispers of *la baïonnette*, and the robbers dropped astern."

About five a.m., they were stopped by the closed gates of a town. Finding no pathway or wood, they lay down



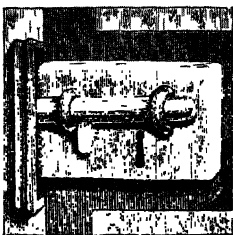
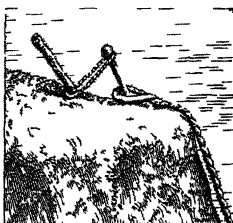
on some rising ground to await the dawn; at once sleep overcame them. With daylight, finding themselves near the fortifications (of Tournay) they crept into a ditch and found shelter among bushes and the ruins of a subterranean entrance. Here, in the warm dusk of their retreat, after nerve-racking escapes and the exertion of that reserve of energy and self-mastery which is given to mortals in danger, Boys says they felt as if "God himself had cast his protecting wings around them."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ESCAPE—*Continued*

At Valenciennes the rope was seen hanging from the high parapet, with the first daylight. Roll-call was beaten, and guns were fired to alarm the country. When their names were called, one by one, a taunting voice replied "*Parti pour l'Angleterre*"—which exasperated the angry *gendarmes* still more. The Commandant treated the latter as mere *gasconnade*, and was heard to say, "*Nous verrons, si ces blanc-becs peuvent m'échapper.*" "A bloody-minded rabble was let loose, with *carte blanche* to massacre," and 500 of the *Garde Nationale* besides, to scour the woods. None believed the missing men could be further off than five leagues.

Meantime the fugitives enjoyed a sound sleep, and had dinner at about 3 p.m., though the flasks were found to be broken. Whitehurst made himself a new cap from the skirts of his coat to replace his lost hat. It rained all the afternoon and evening, when they walked westward and, about ten p.m. indulged in "a sumptuous meal" of



Drawbridge and *garde-fous*

- (1) Rope
- (2) Bolt of gate in the *ravelin*

See page 77



The *Raie-de-Chat* with entrance to loft, beneath which *gendarmes* stabled their horses

See page 86



The *gendarmes* in chase

See page 88



The author in the wood, coming out from under the horse-cloth

See page 93

turnip in a field. By eleven they had rounded the town and gained the North road. At six a.m. they arrived at the suburbs of Courtray [Courtrai] but the town proved to be fortified and surrounded with wet ditches and provided no such snug retreat as that at Tournay. Finding here no safety, it being near daylight, they made for a distant thicket, though that also was found to be surrounded by a wet ditch fourteen feet wide. They had to leap across and land in a bed of brambles. Whitehurst was stiff with wet and cold, and as the bank gave way beneath his great weight, he jumped into the water and had to be dragged out through the severely scratching brambles. At nightfall, the rain having filled up the ditches, three leapt across an opening in the bushes and the fourth made use of an overhanging willow. Courtray being fortified, it was not possible to cross the river Lys there, and the travellers had to go on to Deynse [Deynze], which was an open town. On their reaching a village Whitehurst ventured to buy bread and gin at a *cabaret* and the meal "re-animated and fortified" them. A howling wind and driving sleet and hail forced them to shelter in a thick wood about three miles from Deynse, for their garments "were scarcely felt to be a covering," and all day they listened, shivering, to the storm. Soon after dark, they gained the high road to Deynse, Whitehurst and Mansell always keeping in the rear. Once they were overtaken by two mounted *gendarmes*, who, taking them in the dark for conscripts, cried, "Make haste, you will be late for your lodging-tickets." Boys replied that they were fatigued; and, the rain increasing, soon afterwards the horsemen trotted on, repeating "Make haste, make haste." At ten p.m. it still poured with rain, and after a council of war it was decided to enter a low public-house and purchase provisions, "keeping the door at the elbow in case of necessity." Passing themselves off

as conscripts, lame and late, and without billets, they were readily given lodging and supper, and drew near the stove. "Notwithstanding fears and garlic," they ate a hearty supper, and being now dry took it in turns to sleep on two beds, and watch, till four in the morning; when they managed to evade lookers-on, and took the road to Bruges, having bought two flasks of spirit and provisions.

On Sunday they basked in sunshine amid a thick wood, and listened to church bells. "As Whitehurst, with a praiseworthy and religious sense of the dangers he was to encounter, had packed his prayer-book in his knap-sack, and preserved it through all his disasters, we read prayers, and offered up our humble thanksgivings for deliverance from the hand of the enemy." They quitted the wood at sunset; about three a.m. they crossed the high road to Bruges. Here, in a solitary inn, they warmed themselves and asked for gin. After "regaling themselves with eggs," and drying their clothes a little, they marched on in the rain, and spent the day in a wood "fortified with leaves as before."

Rain, hail, and intense cold almost deprived them of speech. Feet were blistered and tender, and Boys had "a tumour" forming in his left side, so that he could only lie on the right, and feared a life-long rheumatism. In the dark evening, with no stars to be seen, they missed the road and went back a long way. Nevertheless, towards midnight they reached the gates of Bruges. In a public-house an old woman and her servant served them with food, frequently exclaiming, *pauvres conscrits!* They dried their clothes; the sudden heat split Hunter's feet, and Whitehurst had lost two toe-nails. Bathing in oil was a relief, and after a comfortable supper they lay down, and slept and watched as before till four a.m. After wandering in the dark they again took refuge, this time

in a place of safety which they named Windmill Wood. The next was the second fine day since they left Valenciennes, and sunshine was reviving. At sunset they marched on and, having consulted the map during the day, they went directly to the bridge over the canal, doubled round the town to the westward, gained the road to the sea, and again remained hidden all day in a thicket. They were by now in a deplorable state, with cut and bleeding feet, and suffering much from exposure and fatigue, but continued on the way to Blankenburg [Blankenberghe] a village on the coast, a few miles east of Ostend.

And now begins the most dramatic part of their narrative, opening like a fairy-tale. Peeping cautiously through the window of a solitary inn, they saw some people supping comfortably round a fire. Boys and Hunter went in to buy food. They were within four miles of the sea and their plan, always made after consultation and agreement, was to seize a vessel. They asked for gin: "the woman of the house rose and stared at them, they repeated the demand, but still gazing, regardless of their request, she rapturously exclaimed, "*Mon Dieu, ce sont des Anglois,*" and immediately offered them chairs. Disconcerted, they again asked for gin, to which she replied: "Take seats, you shall have whatever my house can afford." They tried to pass themselves off as conscripts, ordered into garrison at Blankenburg, whereupon she burst into a loud laugh, and ran to bar the door and window shutters, telling the servant to fry more ham and eggs. At last she answered their rather feeble excuses with: "Well, then, you are not English, but it is so long since I saw any of my good folks, that I must insist on your eating ham and eggs with me . . . take chairs, if it is only for a few minutes, and then, *par complaisance*, I will believe you."

Her perseverance, her evident sincerity, and their

hunger, gained the day; and, besides, the other two were watching without. During "the most comfortable *régal*," she talked of nothing but her "dear English," and her former happiness in the service of an English family. They took no notice of her sentences in broken English. But, at a loud rap from Whitehurst, now thoroughly alarmed, she started up, and seizing Boys by the arm, thrust them into an inner room, crying, "*Pour l'amour de Dieu, par ici, des gendarmes.*" Her parting words were "Good-night, friends, I shall see you again." And her accent was "more foreign to French than their own." They took provisions for their companions, who had peeped through the shutter and wished to join the party.

About midnight they stopped to listen to the sound of waves, and entered the village of Blankenburg, protected from the sea by the sandbank. Observing a large gateway, Boys, thinking it must be the road to the beach, passed through to reconnoitre, leaving his companions in the street. "To my great consternation, I found myself near a guard-house, and close to a sentry-box, from which I had the good fortune to escape unobserved." After retreating, they took a sandy footpath, and, forgetting their wounds, ran down to the sea and dashed into the water; they even drank of it, splashing about "in exulting delight, like playful schoolboys." It was more than five years since they had last quitted the sea (in the Mediterranean).

A few days before Boys left England in 1802, he had asked his father how he was to get home to pass his examination for a lieutenant, when his six years' service was completed. His parent replied, "Walk home across the Continent," "And thus," says Boys, "with the exception of a few miles, his orders were accomplished."

It was low tide that midnight, and no boat could have been launched then. As they were returning leisurely

along the strand, there was an alarming clash of muskets and sounds of men running. The guards had seen them, and to be retaken meant imprisonment or death. They doubled back, crossed a by-lane, leaped a ditch, and ran over fields to safety. Convinced now of the difficulties of stealing a boat almost under the eyes of the guards, they decided to return to the solitary *cabaret* known as the *Raie-de-Chat*, and afterwards, among themselves, as The Cat. It was midway between Bruges and Blankenburg.

After daybreak they found the landlady, Madame Derikre, still in bed, "but without confusion." They faltered apologies for calling so early, and excuses.

"Bah," she exclaimed with a significant grin, "I told you you could not get off from Blankenburg, and that I should see you again. Sit down, we will have some coffee, and then talk matters over."

Her son, a lad of twelve, kept watch out of the door; she then rose and dressed herself. Later Madame met their compliments and efforts to explain the truth with a "Hold your tongues, I knew you were English gentlemen the moment I saw you." Whereupon, convinced of her sincerity, they offered her one hundred pounds, to be divided with any boatman who would land them in England, or put them and their two comrades on an English vessel. "What comrades?" she exclaimed, "Call them in instantly, and twenty others if they are there; in three or four days you shall all be in England, or I am not an honest woman." The signal was given.

When Whitehurst and Mansell appeared, all were so overpowered, so choked with joy, as to be speechless, tears of gratitude running down their cheeks, and even their vivacious hostess broke down and wept too. After twenty pounds had been cut out of their collars in the presence of Madame, they sat down to breakfast before a comfortable fire. They were then conducted,



for safety, to a hayloft over an unused back room, entirely dependent now upon the sincerity of the family. The sum placed by the French Government on the head of an escaped prisoner was £2, 1s. 8d. The penalty for favouring escape was a fine of £12, 10s. per head, legal expenses, and two months' imprisonment. All were ignorant of the large reward lately offered at Valenciennes for the recapture of the escaped party. The *Raie-de-Chat*, it appeared, was the "house of police correspondence," and was visited regularly three times a week at least by the *gendarmes*. "They always put their horses under a shed at the foot of the loft we occupied, consequently the less likely to be suspected."

The comrades now went so far as to offer all their money; but Madame refused this, or indeed any money, unless she succeeded in a rescue. She helped them to examine and dress all their wounds in the loft. After dark, Cocher the maid and the dog Fox guarded the front door, while the four visitors had some broth downstairs. They slept on clean straw in the loft, as well as their painful wounds would allow.

Next day a confidential friend of Madame Derikre's appeared, named Winderkins. He undertook for a share of the reward to find a trusty fisherman, who would land the Englishmen in England or put them on an English man-of-war.

And now begins a tale of miseries, of heart-breaking delays, failures, defeated hopes, ceaseless intrigues and plotting, and intense suffering. The midshipmen, however, showed determined and fierce resistance to an almost overwhelming fate, and their Flemish landlady, her son, her maidservant and the dog Fox, showed most memorable humanity and disregard of constant danger and risk of disgrace. All lived within the cold grasp of death, with unfailing and even cheerful heroism.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ESCAPE—*Continued*

HOPES at first ran high; twice they bade adieu to The Cat, and twice Winderkins failed them, in spite of gifts and promises of more money. An attempt to seize and borrow a boat was frustrated by the state of the wind and tide, and by the boat being within pistol-shot of the Fort.

On another day English vessels of war appeared, and all fishing smacks were hauled above watermark. Again, bad weather kept the fishermen at home. Things being less hopeful, Winderkins was despatched to Ostend and Nieuport to investigate chances there; he was to return in forty-eight hours.

After three days' silence, Boys went himself to Blankenburg, equipped with Monsieur Derikre's great-coat, large broad-brimmed hat, and canvas gaiters. He took scraps of paper directed to two of the inhabitants, under pretence of purchasing pigs. At two in the afternoon he set out, attended by old Cocher the servant, who walked fifty paces in advance. Madame Winderkins was alone and showed the utmost confusion. Her husband, who had accepted cash and a bill for £30 from the midshipmen, appeared as they were talking. He had visited the coast as far as Calais, and had no hope of success. He was requested to go next day to Flushing, and Boys returned to The Cat.

Next day, 16th December, Winderkins returned from a visit to Flushing with no satisfactory information. He assured Boys that it was utterly impossible to seize the Flushing packet boat as passengers and their passports were strictly examined. They learnt from Madame

Derikre that he had been to Dunkirk and had shown their bill to a banker, who knew the signature and gave a favourable opinion of the bill.

The loft was a dangerous abode, for The Cat was seldom without *gendarmes*, custom-house officers, or foot-soldiers, looking out for seamen.

Feeling how precarious their situation was, Boys and Hunter decided to look in the woods for the most secure asylum they could find. No sooner had they gained the high road to Bruges then they saw two mounted *gendarmes* approaching. Striking into a ploughed field through a gate, they took to their heels. The *gendarmes* galloped to the gate and entered the field just as the fugitives reached a wood. Here was a wide ditch, full to overflowing. They plunged in and swam across, escaped into the wood, and lay there hidden till dark, when they gained the loft again. The *gendarmes*, halting to bait, said they had nearly caught two Blankenburg sailors, "but the rogues swam like ducks."

At this time they amused themselves by writing, in French, the notes on which this narrative is founded.

On 2nd January, another unsuccessful attempt was made to float a vessel, and again on the next night when Winderkins observed, "To-morrow we shall be *chez nous*" [*i.e.* in England]. They returned to The Cat.

Madame Derikre now consulted a friend named Moitier with whom it appeared she had been leagued in unlawful practices respecting conscripts. She was requested to tell the following tale. "A young Englishman, late a prisoner of war, is concealed at Flushing, and offers £50 to any one who will land him in England, or cause him to be put on board an English vessel."

Boys proposed to be this Englishman, and to return in the night for his friends, if he got away in a boat. But they, unwilling to part with him, suggested that Mansell "with his smooth face" might pass disguised as a girl.

Moitier was at first delighted with a new source of wealth, but then began to fear "the Englishman" might be a spy of the French Government; and he himself was at the time under its *surveillance*. So he at first refused help. But on the 12th Madame Derikre saw him again and he consented to go to Flushing and make an agreement with a smuggler. Later he went into Holland. Winderkins despaired of success, but undertook to be on the look-out if the Englishmen seized a boat. He was a sergeant of the National Guard, frequently on duty at Blankenburg. He was now given a bill of £15 instead of the £30, making altogether, for his share, about £17. After discussion of various schemes, and repeated and fruitless jaunts to Blankenburg (Boys had made twelve trips), a great attempt was made on 4th March; when all four went to the Winderkins' house, and Boys reported that several vessels were "nearly afloat."

On a dark night, furnished with provisions and a lantern, the four midshipmen took leave of the Winderkins and jumped on board. "The vessel" says Boys, "was moored by five hawsers; two ahead and three astern. It was arranged that Whitehurst and Mansell should throw overboard the latter, Hunter and I the former; this was preferred to cutting them. We had been so long in Flanders, and received such protection from the natives, that all harsh feeling which might have existed towards an enemy was so mellowed into compassion for their sufferings under the Corsican yoke, that we were unwilling to injure one of them, and therefore had determined, if in our power, to send back the craft, which, being a fishing *schuyt*, might probably be the only support of an indigent family. Whilst Whitehurst and Mansell were executing the duty allotted to them, Hunter and I got ready the foresail, and paid<sup>1</sup> overboard one of the hawsers. The

<sup>1</sup> Let run fathom after fathom.

tide now rolled in, the vessel floated, and we hove her out to within about four fathoms of her buoy. Whitehurst and I being ready to cut the other hawser, and hoist the sail, Hunter went to the helm, when he found the rudder was not shipped, but lying on the poop. We instantly ran aft and got it over the stern, but the vessel pitched so heavily that it was not possible to ship the lower pintle.<sup>1</sup> We were now apprehensive of the total failure of the attempt; for to go to sea without a rudder would have been madness, and being nearly under the battery, we were in momentary expectation of being fired into. Several minutes were passed in this state of anxiety and danger, still persevering in the attempt to ship the rudder, but at length, finding it impossible, without a guide below, and feeling that our only hope was dependent upon the success of this important effort, in the excitement of the moment I jumped overboard; at the same instant, the vessel springing a little ahead, and the sea washing me astern, it was not without the greatest exertion I could swim up to get hold of the stern-post. Hunter, seeing that I was dashed from her by every wave, threw me a rope; this I made fast round my waist, and then, with some trouble, succeeded in shipping the rudder. The effort of swimming and getting on board again, although assisted by my comrades, so completely exhausted me, that I lay on my back for some time, incapable of moving a limb; but at length rallying, I went forward to help hoist the foresail, whilst Hunter cut the hawser, and then ran to the helm. The sail was no sooner up than the vessel sprang off, as if participating in our impatience, and glorying in our deliverance. . . . A violent shock suddenly arrested our progress. We flew aft, and found that a few fathoms of the starboard quarter hawser having been accidentally left on board, a kink was formed near the

<sup>1</sup> Bolt or pin on which rudder hangs.

end, which, getting jammed between the head of the rudder and the stern-post, had brought the vessel up all standing; the knife was instantly applied, but the hawser was so excessively taut and hard, that it was scarcely through one strand ere the increasing squall had swung her round off upon the beach. At this critical juncture, as a forlorn hope, we jumped out to seize another vessel, which was still afloat; when Winderkins, seeing a body of men running upon the top of the sand-hills, in order to surround us, gave the alarm." Leaving knapsacks and all they possessed except the clothes on their backs, they leapt ashore and eventually reached The Cat in safety.

Madame Derikre, in fear of a strict search, after this, especially to Boys, heartrending disaster, destroyed all evidence of their stay; and, leaving Mansell behind, the others set out for Windmill Wood where they had once sheltered, on the other side of Bruges. The loft had been so bitterly cold with its open tiling and exposure to all winds, that latterly Madame had lodged them by night, more comfortably, in a small place with a door opening on the woods, guarded by one of themselves in turn, assisted by the friendly Fox. Now they fled to the woods, "taking all the bread in the house with them." It was agreed that Mansell should go to Moitier, disguised as a girl, and tell him there were four Englishmen, not one, to be shipped. Mansell was to procure shoes for each, provisions, and as much cash as he could raise, bringing all back in his disguise. Should he succeed, they planned to quit Flanders, and walk through France and Germany to Trieste, in the Gulf of Venice; hearing that the entire coast of Holland was still as strictly watched as that of Flanders. But the other three hoped that Mansell could get away to England alone, as owing to his youth and inexperience he was not capable of undertaking such a journey.

There was no time to dry clothes at The Cat, and they

were now unshod, wet to the skin, and with ends of garments frozen solid. To this was added keen anxiety. For no Mansell appeared. Was he a prisoner? Or had he forgotten? Was Moitier treacherous? After three days, supplies were exhausted and they stole out to The Cat, and halted about one a.m. to listen for *gendarmes*. Then, leaving Whitehurst and Hunter under the orchard hedge, ready to fly at an alarm, Boys advanced through a gap in the hedge, expecting every moment to be butchered. A cold touch on his hand startled him, but he forced himself to advance, and found Fox, the dog, trotting before him, having given "his cold mark of recognition in the dark, and assurance of safety." Madame Derikre begged him not to enter when he gently tapped at the window. She knew nothing of Mansell, and had left him at Moitier's in his disguise as a girl. The house had been minutely searched by thirty-six *gendarmes* and police officers, but they found nothing. The Winderkins had been arrested and their house searched, and The Cat searched a second time. She agreed to borrow money from Moitier and buy shoes. They returned to the wood, laden with gin, bread and cold potatoes.

After they had retreated to a thick wood, on the 10th, an alarming rustling was heard. This proved to be the faithful Fox, who had hunted them out, and "now fawned upon us, as much elated as ourselves." He led them to his young master, who had brought cheese and eggs. When this lad, now much attached to them, saw their poor camp of basketwork made of twigs, and heard of their sufferings, he burst into a flood of tears. Madame had seen Mansell, who was without money, concealed in the house of Moitier, who had gone to Holland. The boy promised to bring more food, and vowed that prison was better than perishing with cold in the woods. Boys gave him his watch, his one remaining valuable.

The weather now increased in severity, and they lay, literally clad in ice, with numbing limbs. Winds blew, hail beat down, the raging violence of the storms threatened almost to uproot the wood itself, and death seemed the only end to such misery. Once an old man found them, and promised to bring a loaf, but it seemed wiser, when he had gone, to break up camp; and they fled. Fox and his master met them and directed them to a thick wood two miles away. Moitier had returned. On 15th March the boy re-appeared, Fox having traced them out. His mother had seen the agent, who declared that Mansell had never mentioned his companions; he vaguely promised help. They suspected him of making all he could out of Mansell and of caring little about the severe reflections cast upon the lad's character. No money came, and no shoes. Whitehurst now became very ill, and in spite of patience and fortitude he nearly died. All were gloomy and restless, almost desperate, but they prevailed upon the boy to bring a horse-cloth; and, as none of them had second coats, it proved of the greatest comfort; and indeed, Boys says: "it so renovated our strength, that we were more firmly than ever bent upon marching into Germany." Now heavy snow fell, and fears for discovery of their tracks were felt. Madame Derikre very considerably sent a stock of bread and gin and a little meat. A hollow place was found and twigs laid in it to make a dry bed. Over this the horsecloth was spread, propped in the centre with a stick, and fastened down with pegs to form a sort of tent. One corner admitted air, and was entrance and exit. Here the friends lay in comfort, only to be compared to a warm bed, after nearly freezing to death. Once the boy appeared, breathless, from The Cat, with an alarm of armed men approaching the house; the midshipmen instantly broke up camp and fled, crossing an eighteen-foot ditch by means of a log, and



hiding in an almost impenetrable thicket. Here, later, Fox "burst into view," fawning and curling himself in silent congratulation, as if sensible of a narrow escape; his affectionate master followed to say that all was well. "This little trip, we imagined, did us good," Boys adds, "from the exercise it afforded."

At length hunger, and wet from rain and overflowing ditches, forced them to The Cat. Two went in, got dry and ate, while Fox kept watch at the door with the third. The faithful animal now growled at every *gendarme* he saw, although he had seen them and been caressed by them all his life. On one such excursion, Whitehurst, weak and worn with his illness, fell into a ditch, and swinging with his face upwards under an old overhanging tree, must have horrified his companions till they contrived his rescue. After that he remained in "the nest," and Hunter and Boys continued their nightly visits alone. By now the esteem and warm interest of the inmates of The Cat had grown so intense, that poor old Cocher, the servant, offered to pawn even her gold cross and heart, and all she possessed, to Moitier, if he would befriend the poor "Englishers."

The unwearying Madame Derikre now learnt that Mansell had embarked for England with a smuggler, in an open boat fifteen feet long. Hope was revived. Would he not return to the coast, bringing a boat, or somehow send help? But he did not. Madame and Boys were now forbidden to enter Moitier's house, but Boys determined to go there. This was the first unconcerted resolution; for his comrades were ready to suffer to the limit of human endurance, rather than be taken, but hated to separate, and disapproved of this step. Boys wished to avoid discussion or a first disagreement. If he failed, he alone would be to blame. After a month of keen distress, in thread-bare clothes, Boys told Hunter

on the night of 31st March that if nothing was heard of himself next day, they must believe him to be taken and act for themselves. Hunter argued vainly; they shook hands and parted. The night spent in the stable at The Cat by Boys was sleepless; "though the dog Fox at the door seemed to watch with increase of vigilance, my bed in this solitary cell was not one of roses." He was by turns anxious and remorseful. Would his friends think he had deserted them? Could he ever prove the contrary if they—or he—should be retaken? . . . Then he resolutely turned to more cheerful plans for the morrow, till four a.m.; when he awoke Madame who proceeded to disguise him again. This time she added a carpenter's rule, line and chalk, and after refreshment they set out for Bruges. At dawn they separated and entered the gates 100 yards apart, just as early labourers were going to work. "In passing the guard at the gates, I was chalking and rubbing out figures upon the rule, as if my mind was wholly occupied in my business. The *gendarmes* eyed me curiously, but on I trudged till, in passing Moitier's door, Madame Derikre made a momentary pause, placing her hand on her hip as a signal to me, and then went on without looking behind her." And that ordeal was over.

Moitier was out, but Boys was not long in causing his wife to weep over his tale. "*Pauvre enfant, pauvre malheureux,*" she kept murmuring. She became much agitated when Boys referred to Mansell's safe arrival in England owing to her husband's kindness. He was conducted to an attic. Moitier, when he arrived, dwelt on the danger to himself; and then a long debate took place between a rogue and a cool-headed, determined and desperate youth. Boys offered £150 in bills, payable on demand. Moitier declared he had received nothing from Mansell and expenses had been heavy. Here Boys asked for a few

minutes alone to consider, hoping that meantime Moitier would consult the now friendly Madame Moitier. In about half an hour she brought him up some coffee, saying kindly that he should stay till evening; she pleaded poverty and risk of ruin, the dread of banishment and disgrace (Moitier being *Notaire public*), but promised to do her best. Boys now offered himself as hostage for the other two. Moitier objected to the danger of keeping him. At length Boys requested him to go to Verdun with bills, to make enquiries, get some cashed and payment of the rest insured.

After Moitier, whose face had somewhat brightened at the mention of bills, had retired to consider for two harassing hours, he returned to propose that Boys should abandon the other two and remain in his house. Repressing wrath and disgust, Boys declared his intention of sharing his friends' fate, free or enchained, and only now asked for a small loan to buy shoes and necessities for a long journey, through France and Germany to Trieste. "*Mon Dieu! quelle persévérance!*" exclaimed Moitier. Boys was now inclined to think that this man hoped to make greater profit by "embarking them in detail"; and now exonerated Mahsell, in his own thoughts, from any possible suspicion that he had not done all he could for them; "every charitable allowance should be made for so inexperienced a youth in the power of so experienced a rogue."

About two o'clock, Moitier returned, introducing Auguste Crens Neirinks. This Flemish *chevalier d'industrie* was to find a hiding-place. Moitier was to go with the bills to Verdun, to a friend of Boys, Captain T. G. Wills, R.N. (who died later). This officer would risk his all to help. Then a boat was to be hired or bought. Madame Derikre, waiting anxiously in a local public-house, took back the good news. Her son was sent from The Cat

into the woods, and "its forlorn inmates" were escorted through by-paths and thickets, reaching Bruges before the gates closed. They mingled with the throng and passed in unobserved. Madame then led them to the attics of a small empty house in a back street, where Boys rejoined them after dark. Here they displayed great delight and touching gratitude at the sudden and bewildering change of fortune. A poor friend of the owner was put to occupy the front rooms. They had a table, four chairs, a stump bedstead filled with clean, dry straw. This was luxury! Neirinks and his brother often visited them, and sent in provisions by their fellow-lodger. He also introduced Boys to his elderly mother, and to her daughters, Mary and Pauline, who pitied their visitors' plight.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ESCAPE—*Continued*

WHILST waiting idly for Moitier to return, Boys had the wild and quixotic idea of trying to release his friend Moyses from Givet. Neirinks decidedly disapproved, as did Hunter and Whitehurst. But in the end Neirinks was persuaded to lend his pocket-book, with certificates and passport; Boys promising, if taken, to say he had found them on the road. So determined did he appear, that Neirinks agreed to furnish a little cash and some clothes, promising to be his companion. Boys had, as usual, a complete scheme. It was to proceed to Brussels, to drive on to Givet, to call on an old surgeon friend, with face bound-up as if with toothache; to smuggle a note to Moyses in prison, desiring him to get leave to go into the

town; Moyses was to try to evade, or to intoxicate, the guard who would accompany him, having chosen one "not averse to the juice of the grape." He was then to join his friends and drive to Brussels, where a false passport was prepared, and all were to meet in the attic in Bruges. In the event of pursuit, they were to fly to the woods.

Neirinks told his sister Mary, "a lass of eighteen," and she offered to go with them to Brussels. "I need not describe," says Boys, "the astonishment this proposal excited, but it was not for me to question its propriety. I was, however, resolved her mother's consent should first be obtained, and I saw her for that purpose in the evening; it was then arranged, that we should travel as brother and sister, and Neirinks as a wine-merchant. I studied the signature of Neirinks, and could soon execute it *à merveille*." (If doubts of identity arose, the traveller had to sign his name.)

On the evening of 14th April, Neirinks, the young lady and Boys, "in high spirits," took leave of their friends, and arrived next morning at Ghent by passage-boat on the canal. "I took but little notice of my sister, there being several passengers in the boat who knew her." They took quarters in an inn and passports were examined and countersigned. Moitier had arranged that Neirinks should go to Antwerp and Flushing to see if Peter the smuggler had returned from taking Mansell to England; and Boys directed Neirinks to find out the military strength of the neighbourhood, and the number of vessels of war. He proved discreet and indefatigable.

"After Neirinks' departure, Mademoiselle and I amused ourselves by walking about the town and visiting the fair. In this singular situation, I passed one of my pleasantest days since my stay on the continent. To be accompanied and protected by an amiable and innocent little girl, rendered doubly engaging by the deep interest

she manifested in my fate; to be thus escorted through a hostile town, where, if known, I should have been chained by the neck, and cast into its deepest dungeon; to be accosted with the appellation of *frère*, imperceptibly growing into *mon cher frère* (*honi soit qui mal y pense*), was indeed, an interesting novelty—a change of circumstances which could not fail to excite lively feelings of gratitude and esteem and which I shall ever think and speak of with the most pleasing recollections. I felt myself bound to be particularly circumspect in my deportment. It was necessary to maintain a certain degree of easy vivacity, without being too forward; for this might have been considered as taking advantage of the confidence reposed in me; whilst, being reserved would have appeared cold, and insensible to the value of her protection.

“In one of our promenades, during the days we were in Ghent, we met about twenty prisoners, chained to each other by the neck, and escorted by four horse *gendarmes*. Instead of turning down a side street to avoid them, we walked boldly past, to the great amusement of my sister, of whose firmness of mind I cannot speak too highly.”

Neirinks rejoined them on the third day, with warnings of the hazardous nature of any attempt to embark. They then reached Brussels by *diligence*, the passports being again examined, and the lady was escorted to her aunt's. Boys was introduced as “brother” Jean, who had been absent many years, but “of this the loquacious and merry old lady was not to be persuaded and accused me of being the lover of her niece, for which,” added she, “you are the more welcome.” “Still passing by my name of ‘Jean,’ her daughter Julie, an interesting young lady of nineteen, received and embraced me as her long lost cousin.”

Next day, Boys almost ran into a lieutenant of *gendarmes*

at the hotel door. "I, however, strolled in, as if unconcerned, gently bending as I passed." The friend, Hinds, whom he was seeking, when at length found, doubted the evidence of his senses. He knew that Boys had broken out of prison only eighteen leagues distant, five months before. Hinds lent him some money.

"On returning to the house of Neirinks' aunt," Boys continues, "and entering the spacious drawing-room, I found the young ladies sitting *tête-à-tête* by a comfortable fire. As they arose when I drew near, I perceived a transparent drop trickling down the pale cheek of Julie, and something like confusion stealing over the excited countenances of both; *quel fatal présent du ciel qu'un cœur sensible!* Fearing intrusion, I gently bowed and was retiring, when Mary advanced, and modestly led me up to her cousin, who, with a graceful affability, presented her hand, faltering something quite unintelligible; nor could I divine the mystery of the scene, until she wished me a safe arrival in the bosom of my family." After a cosy talk round the fire, and a recital of his story, Julie entered into the spirit of the plot, and determined to go with them to Bruges; but her mother refused to give her permission.

Next day, Neirinks not appearing, "I strutted about the town, with the ladies under my arm; visited all the fashionable promenades, and in the evening went to the theatre: towards the close of the performance, Neirinks came in; we escorted the ladies home, and retired to our tavern." The "jovial old aunt" hired a *cabriole* next day, and the two men drove towards Charleroi, meaning to reach Givet. In the village of Waterloo, where they ordered *déjeuner* in a public-house, two *gendarmes* appeared inquisitive; they were invited to join the party, and fared sumptuously. Moitier suddenly appeared, to the surprise of all three, at Dinant. He had a letter from Wills. Strange to tell, Wills was the very first Englishman

Moitier addressed on his arrival at Verdun, when after a little conversation, they retired to his quarters and there showed each other their credentials, which consisted of halves of a card irregularly cut in two, with corresponding private marks on each.

"One half I had given to Moitier, the other I had previously sent to Wills by post, so that neither of them could be deceived. Wills's half was returned to me after the war, and is still in my possession." That valuable friend had concealed and entertained the agent at his house, got the bills cashed, and guaranteed payment of every engagement that Boys should enter into with him. Moyses had been sent to Bitche, 200 miles away, and Boys, though he calmly discussed a rescue, was reluctantly compelled by the others to abandon his design.

"Moitier's vacillating, equivocal conduct was now changed into a bold and resolute determination to enter into the cause with spirit and energy"; in proof of which he offered to lend Boys any sum he chose to borrow. He left for Flushing to make arrangements with Peter.

"The day was passed at *my aunt's*; the next, Neirinks, myself and *my sister*, bade adieu to the family." After reaching Bruges and conducting his *sister* home, he rejoined his friends, who rejoiced, as they feared he had been retaken.

During the absence of Boys, Madame Derikre, seeing the tattered state of his friends' wardrobes, applied to two Irish nuns in the convent, "who in the spirit of true charity, discarding all religious prejudices, immediately sent them shirts, stockings, and a trifle in cash. Mr. Edwards, an Englishman who had put Moitier in the right way of sending Mansell to England, had, at imminent risk to himself, received Whitehurst and Hunter at his house, and shared his scanty meals with them, when they were literally starving."



On 28th April, Neirinks said the guide would be in attendance next day. The evening was spent with the family, and Boys talked to the old lady in Flemish, her only tongue. Moitier now announced that Peter required a fee of £80, instead of the £40 agreed upon; half on landing in England and half to be left on note of hand to Moitier. The £80 was paid, but Boys suspected afterwards that Moitier pocketed the extra £40. Farewells were sent to Madame Derikre, and a faithful promise to discharge her bills. She had had altogether about £80, apart from anything given her by Moitier. On the 29th, soon after sunset, Boys again thanked the Neirinks family, more particularly *ma chère sœur*, and embraced them, and departed.

At close of evening, "looking as Flemish as possible," they stole out singly, fifty paces apart, led by Neirinks, and passed almost unnoticed with the crowd through the gates and joined the waiting guide. "Our joy was now indeed great, almost equal to that experienced when we found ourselves in the ditch after descending the last rampart at Valenciennes."

Neirinks was to accompany them to England, to receive the stipulated reward. They marched in pairs by woods and cross roads towards the Island of Cadsand, opposite Flushing, till one a.m. On reaching the coast, they were met by Peter's wife, "who ordered us to lie down on the ground, whilst this Amazonian chief reconnoitered the strand. She had scarcely proceeded a hundred yards, when she was hailed, and saluted with a shot; like a skilful general, she instantly made good her retreat, and bivouac'd with the main body." After anxious hours, the boat not appearing, all retreated to Peter's hut, and they spent day after day in this miserable retreat. At length, on 8th May, news came that all would be in readiness at 10 p.m.; and on a fine, dark night they marched to the beach where their private signal was made, and answered.

"The boat gliding silently inshore, with muffled oars, we rushed in with the rapidity of thought, and in an instant all were safe afloat; each seized an oar and vigorously applying his utmost strength, we soon reached beyond the range of shot . . . the lapse of a few minutes had wrought such a change of extremes that I doubt, if amidst the confusion of senses, we could immediately divest ourselves of the apprehensions, which constant habit had engrafted on the mind; nor, indeed, could we relinquish the oar, but continued at this laborious, though now delightful, occupation without intermission, the whole night.

"When the day dawned, the breeze freshened from the eastward, and as the sun began to diffuse his cheering rays, the wide expanse of liberty opened around us. . . . While thus delightfully scudding before the foaming billows, which occasionally broke, as if to overwhelm our little boat, only fifteen feet in length, each eye was steadily fixed ahead, anxious to be the first to announce land. It was not, however, till towards 3 p.m. that the white cliffs were seen. . . . On falling in with a fishing-smack at the back of the Goodwin Sands, the master welcomed us on board, and taking the boat in tow, ran for Ramsgate." On entering the harbour at 5 o'clock, Boys says that after six months of constant danger and sufferings, he thanked the Almighty Disposer of events, and "with a heart throbbing almost to suffocation, regardless of the numerous spectators, fell down, and kissed with rapture the blessed land of Liberty."

But here, to their surprise and disappointment, the foreigners were not allowed to land, but were ordered to Dover. In spite of their own impatience to embrace their families ("mine," says Boys, "only nine miles distant"), it was a point of honour not even to appear to desert those to whom they owed their happiness. They must be

comfortably placed in a public-house. The master of the smack agreed to run them down to Dover. Before making sail, Boys wrote a note to one of his brothers who lived at Margate. They reached Dover at 8 p.m., but as it was after dark were not permitted to land, and slept on board. They landed at daylight on 10th May, and left the foreigners in comfort, after visiting the custom-house.

They then took chaises and departed for Betshanger [now Betteshanger], the residence of Boys' father. The "white cliffs" seen by Boys were not only England for him, but his home. They were then grassy, flowering cliffs without concrete walks or iron railings; some of the beautiful Ramsgate houses were then newly built. The estate of Betteshanger, still quiet, wooded and pleasant, though now associated with the name of a colliery, lies off the Roman Road, between Ramsgate and Dover and near Eastry. The present house, built about 1929, was for years a school.

"Mansell, on his arrival, anxious to bear glad tidings to my family, had called at Betshanger, and injudiciously assured a younger sister, whom he happened to find alone, 'that we should either be dead or in England in three weeks, as we had vowed not to be taken alive'."—The parents of Boys set on foot every possible method to render assistance through the smugglers, but as six weeks had passed, hope faded, and the broken-hearted family were about to put on mourning, when the brother from Margate burst in with the great news. Boys remarks that "only parents can judge of the effect upon the best of parents, not unmindful that their prayers had been heard by Him who is mighty to save. . . . On the road from Dover, when I was busy in search of the roof under which I received the first impressions of discipline, Neirinks, whom I had taken with me, and who was admiring everything he saw, as *magnifique*, suddenly exclaimed: '*Regardez ce*

*vénérable dans cette belle voiture,*’ when I immediately recognised my father; we joined and speedily drove to Bets-hanger, where a scene awaited me, that I had little anticipated.”

Neirinks remained at Betteshanger till the 7th, and was then sent, with the foreigners and their boat, off Flushing, by order of Commodore (now Sir Edward) Owen. With the money they received, which they considered amply sufficient, they had previously purchased indigo and coffee, “which yielded them a profit of about 600 per cent.” They were not only content, but inclined to assist other English captives who might reach their coasts. The expenses of the midshipmen amounted to £135 each.

Hunter was soon afterwards employed, and promoted in 1811. Whitehurst was sent to the Halifax station where, before long, he was again made prisoner in the *Junon*, and detained in France during the remainder of the war. “Lt. Whitehurst” is mentioned elsewhere as a prisoner of war at Bitche between 1812 and 1814. Mansell soon after died at sea. The following obituary notice appeared in the *Naval Chronicle*.<sup>1</sup> “Lately, on board the *Circe* at Gibraltar, Mr. Mansell, eldest son of the Bishop of Bristol. He was taken a prisoner at the age of thirteen, with the brave and unfortunate Captain Wright in the *Vincego* and carried into France. He continued there about five years, during which time he underwent much hardship and many cruelties, on account of the firmness of his determination, even at that tender age, not to give information which might affect his captain, against whom the enemy was bitterly incensed.

“They suspected him of having landed Georges Pichegru, etc. Mansell finally succeeded in making his escape, but the sufferings he endured from his long and repeated concealment in wet ditches, woods, marshes, etc.

<sup>1</sup> *Naval Chronicle*, 1810, vol. 24, p. 516.

for upwards of three months, during the course of that escape, too visibly affected his constitution."

"The day after my arrival," says Boys, "I proceeded to London, and had the honour of an audience of Lord Mulgrave, then first Lord of the Admiralty. I then delivered the packet of despatches at the Foreign Office, with which I was imprudently charged by a Mr. Edwards of Bruges, who it appeared was in correspondence with the Government. If I had been taken with this packet about me, it would have afforded the enemy an additional reason for whatever severity of punishment they might have been disposed to inflict. A few days after, his Lordship was pleased to issue an order for my examination, without waiting the usual period fixed for that purpose, and immediately appointed me lieutenant of the *Arachne*.

"At the Admiralty I learnt that the father of Ricketts was in the *Theseus* in the Downs." Boys was thus able to send him news of his son, and of his probable escape, frustrated by illness before.

In June, the *Arachne*, Captain Samuel Chambers, was ordered to Flushing. Boys had meanwhile found his old friend Cecil<sup>1</sup> in Deal Hospital; he went there, and as Cecil was convalescent, escorted him to Betteshanger, "when he gave me back my leather folding cup which I had given him at Verdun, and which is still in my possession."

The very first day that Boys went ashore in his new uniform at Middleburg<sup>2</sup> [Middelburg], he unexpectedly met his old friend, Peter the smuggler, who threw his arms round the neck of Boys and kissed him. "Nevertheless," he says, "I was as much elated as Peter could

<sup>1</sup> See escape of Cecil, chapter VIII.

<sup>2</sup> The island of Walcheren had been taken by the English since the departure of Boys from the coast.

possibly be; for, without him, I might at that hour have been attired in a galley garb, decorated with a ponderous chain, far from that busy scene." Peter, in an adjoining tavern, handed him a letter. It was from Midshipmen Ricketts, Rochford and Robinson, to say that they had escaped from Valenciennes, and were hidden near The Cat. As the *Theseus* was in Flushing, not a moment was lost in communicating with Ricketts' father, and preparing deliverance for the fugitives. On board the *Theseus*, the greater part of the ship's crew had volunteered their services, but the crew of the eight-oared cutter (called on board "fire-eaters") claimed the right of precedence. "Towards sunset . . . we made sail . . . accompanied by Peter. On approaching the main, about midnight, we struck the mast, pulled in shore with muffled oars, and landed Peter unobserved by the patrols, on the very spot from whence I had embarked on 8th May . . . there we waited, about a musket shot out, for Peter's return with the captives, till dawn, but returned without them. Five successive nights we returned, but no Peter was there. On the 6th day the *Arachne* was ordered to sea. . . . Happily, however, the same night Lieutenant Edgar of the *Theseus* proceeded to the same spot; about ten o'clock the private signal was made—he pulled inshore—in an instant Peter and the fugitives rushed into the boat, and were happily restored to their families and his Majesty's service."

## NOTE.

The Cornish seaman, Mr. Thomas Williams, says that when he was in prison at Ostend, a young man called Peter Wefors visited him and his companions and spoke good English. The prisoners were at first shy and cautious, but afterwards became very friendly. They found their visitor knew England well. Later, Peter's sister, Mary Ann, paid them a kindly visit, and

Mr. Williams says that she and her mother "cried the whole night" afterwards. The wife of Peter was an Englishwoman from Liverpool. She had been the wife of the master of a French vessel, lost on the Goodwin Sands. Was this "Peter the smuggler," and his "amazonian" wife? These prisoners also spoke with another, a fisherman from Blankenburg, accused of helping Englishmen to escape. His father kept an Inn there, called The Barque and Ray, and another house "of the same kind" was mentioned, probably the *Raie-de-Chat*.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER XII

### EPILOGUE

IN the third and fourth editions of his book, published in 1863 and 1864, Captain Boys added two chapters. One is about the Commandants at Verdun, during the war. None who knew him seem able to praise or venerate too highly the Baron de Beauchêne, "the very foundation of justice and equity"; after his lamented death, he was succeeded by that gallant soldier, the high-minded and benevolent Major de Meulan.

Boys then relates the circumstances of a visit that he paid, for the benefit of his children's health and of his own rheumatism, in 1845, to drink the waters at Liège. They stayed a night, as it happened, at Bruges, and Captain Boys at once inquired for Madame Derikre of the *Raie-de-Chat*, near Blankenburg. He was told of her death, four years earlier, at Ostend. He then drove out with his family in a hired carriage, and all were thrilled as they

<sup>1</sup> Hain, *Prisoners of War in France*, 1914, pp. 93, 94, 97, 99.

passes the various scenes of his adventures. But the new hostess of The Cat and a guest of her's were both ignorant of the fate of Madame Derikre. Every part of the premises was examined, and the eldest daughter of Captain Boys mounted the loft and threw herself down on the straw, as her father had done in 1808 and 1809. No trace of the families of Derikre or Winderkins could be found; it was generally supposed that Madame was dead. He now engaged an intelligent Commissioner called Pierre, and together they visited the market and some public offices in Ostend. Pierre at length grew weary of the vain search, and they were discussing matters on the bridge, when "a decrepit, old little man, selling apples, rose and said: 'pardon me, gentlemen, but it occurs to me that it is not Madame Derikre you seek, but the old *Frau* called the *Ænglishe Reeker*.'" He said she was alive last year, and that she and also he himself, had received aid from the parish. They made further inquiries and rapped at many doors.

"At length a person told us there was an old, blind woman, bed-ridden, living on the upper floor of No. 20 Rue Blanc [*sic*]. . . . I quickly followed her up into a back room when, to my horror, I saw in a corner, sitting erect on a stump bedstead and palliasse, a withered remnant of human wretchedness, quite blind, and partially covered with a dirty tattered garment and a substitute for a blanket."

Painfully disappointed at their failure, and apologising for the intrusion, Captain Boys first made a few simple enquiries, which were clearly answered. . . . He then asked if she had heard of prisoners of war.

'She said she had assisted many young officers to escape when she kept a country public-house. "Pierre now became impatient, and asked if I were satisfied? 'Wait,' I said, 'for one more question,' and then said to her—



'Tell me, what were the names of the first four English you say you assisted to escape?' Without the slightest hesitation she quickly replied:—

'Edward Boys,

'Robert Hunter,

'Frederick Whitehurst,

'William Mansell.'

"Astonished, I hesitated a moment, then asked if she had seen this Edward Boys? She replied, 'Not since his escape; but when I was in England, I was sent to the Admiralty, and there told that he was employed in the West Indies'."

"This again surprised me, at the same time that it dissipated all doubt of her identity. After a moment's reflection, and knowing she was blind, I told her to give me her hand. She did so. I then added—'You have the hand of Edward Boys!'

"She paused—trembled—slowly raised her head, and rolled her full black eyes round the ceiling, as if bewildered, and struggling for sight to recognise the man whose hand she now held in firm grasp. I could no longer endure the painful sight of such wretchedness in one, to whom I felt, that in early life, I was indebted for safety from the enemy, and for my subsequent good fortune.

"Thirty-six years had elapsed since we separated in the street in Bruges near M. Moitier's house. . . . Satisfied that I could not be deceived (though recalling no feature, nothing indeed, but her quickness and clearness of expression), I gave orders for her to be washed and dressed, and promising to be back in an hour, left the room. In the meantime I took with me the woman of the house to a shop, and provided every article of dress suitable to Madam Derikre's situation, of which she stood in need, with all the necessary duplicates. In these she was attired, and had her dinner.

“ . . . I called at the apple shed and rewarded the old man who was much pleased. When I returned to the house, I found her in the front room, clean, and clad in her new garments, looking quite a different being; still I did not recollect her.”

They talked for about four hours: she spoke French fluently, and though weak and failing bodily, her mental faculties were unimpaired. Before the Captain left her, she was told to fear no want; she was to have a franc a day paid to her by a banker in Ostend weekly, as long as she lived. (The parish allowance was eight francs a month.)

Tears flowed from the blind eyes of the old woman, who was confused and speechless. “I said, ‘I must now leave you; to-morrow my wife and daughters, who are at Bruges, will come and see you, and will carry out my promise, should you survive me; therefore, I repeat, make yourself happy,’ I kissed her, and took leave.” She was then in her 80th year. The following day she was found sitting in the front room, clean and cheerful, but unable to walk.

“My wife, daughters, and female attendant, were successively named to her, when to each she presented her hand, and had something pleasing to say. She said she was in a dream, adding, ‘I want for nothing, my good friends.’ But we sent in for her property, a few articles of bedding and linen, to which she had long been a stranger. She now called herself ‘the happiest woman in Ostend,’ and added, *‘parce que je suis contente’*.”

The tale of her discovery spread, and English visitors went to see her, but all gifts she transferred to her landlady, Madame Van Hecke, who “received and supplied all.” She never forgot the goodness of this family, who were themselves very poor and who in pure compassion took her in and fed and clothed her to the best of their

limited ability, when her daring exploits had left her wrecked and destitute.

Her story was somewhat confused, and Captain Boys does his best to present it from several Flemish sources, and from her own tales.

In consequence of the prompt payments of their party, Madame Derikre had extended her speculations and helped prisoners from various *dépôts* to escape, through her agents, until fifteen had safely reached England. He notes that the Flemish hated the French yoke, and were favourably inclined towards the English. In 1811, the French authorities arrested Madame and some others in league with her, and they were imprisoned in Bruges. Here repeated examinations took place, often subtle, and generally harsh, to induce confession; but none could be extorted from her. Then the nerves of a former associate [Winderkins] gave way, and he informed against her. They were confined till March 1812 and then removed to Bruges, where they underwent repeated examinations, some terrifying; Madame Derikre listened attentively, with calm courage, to the evidence, and to the sentence, *Condamnée à mort*. For she and the nine others were told that they were to be shot on the following Monday. One, a German, hanged himself that night; and, for some unknown reason, the others were reprieved. But they were long kept in suspense, and became used at last to patrols by night and the noise of prison bolts. She was scrupulously faithful to her associates; for, although Moitier and the young Fleming Neirinks were believed to have helped her, they were never suspected by the authorities.

Young Derikre went to England with a party of fugitives and returned for conscription; he was soon after arrested and put in the same prison, though not in the same room as his mother; he expected always to be called to take a last farewell of her. He was later hurried away with the

army on its march to Moscow; "and, the fatigue being too much for his tender youth, he died with many other conscripts, exhausted, in hospital at Smolensk."

In 1813 his mother was removed to Ghent where she remained till February 1814, when the Cossacks appeared and freed all prisoners. Soon after, she visited The Cat and collected her hidden papers, but learnt in a few days of the death of her husband, who knew not where she was. His debts swallowed up her little property, and she was advised to take the English bills of exchange to a banker in London. She sailed in a packet from Ostend to Margate, and on landing soon found out her old friend Robert Hunter. He took her home and gave her new clothes and kept her in his house for some days. She then went to London, and Captain Boys says she never complained of any defaulter among the English except one, for £15. But an accomplished thief (with a French name) seems to have robbed her of £500 and got away with it. Perhaps she had trusted him to collect the money? She later returned home, and with the remaining funds started a little business. She was again cheated, and failed and had eventually to apply for parish relief. She now became blind and a helpless beggar, with neither husband, child, friend, house nor property, and was often hunted and hooted through the streets by a rabble of boys. Then one day Madame Van Hecke took pity on her and led her home and put her to bed. "She used to say she always prayed to see a gentleman she had saved, for she knew he would have compassion on her . . . he came—she spoke to him and she was relieved. . . . It was wonderful to see in one so roughly treated and so subdued, calm resignation and cheerful contentment and such warm gratitude."

"In this state," Captain Boys concludes, "and in this family, frequently visited by one of us (the last time in May), Madame Derikre lived till June 1849, when at the

age of eighty-four, she breathed her last, at peace with all mankind. *Requiescat in pace.*"

In *The Times*, 27th June 1849, was the following report of her death:—

"On the 24th June, at Ostend, in her eighty-fourth year, Madame Derikre, who, during the war, assisted at different times, fifteen English officers to escape from France, for which offence she was incarcerated four years and eventually liberated from the prison of Ghent by the Cossacks in 1814. During her later years, she was comfortably provided for by one of the above party."

After attending the Expedition to Walcheren, Lieutenant Boys proceeded to the West Indies, where he was appointed Acting Commander for a time. In July 1814 he was confirmed in the Command of the *Duneira*, 18 guns; but owing to the Peace and a reduced navy, was placed on half-pay in September. From 1837 till 1841 he was Superintendent of the Dockyard at Deal. In 1831 there appeared his *Remarks on the Practicability and Advantages of a Sandwich or Downs Harbour*. He retired in 1851 with Captain's rank, and died in London in 1866.

Captain Marryat introduces the umbrella mode of escape in *Peter Simple*. But nothing can equal the fascination and charm of the modest and candid narrative of Boys himself, unspoil't by the romantic elaboration of the contemporary novel. He himself in the "explanatory note" to the fourth edition, says "it is written for the amusement of those who can read with a spirit of charity, the simple production of an old sailor."

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## CHAPTER XIII

### ATTEMPTED ESCAPE FROM VERDUN OF SEACOME ELLISON, K——, DR. BARKLIMORE AND ROBERT ALISON AND ARRIVAL OF SEACOME ELLISON AT BITCHE

THE success of Cecil's escape was a sharp stimulant to effort. Early in the fifth year of their captivity, Peter K—— was authorised by a mutual friend to unfold a secret plan of escape.

"As the name of this friend has not yet appeared in this narrative," says Ellison, "I shall here introduce the reader to Mr. Archibald Barklimore,<sup>1 2</sup> surgeon, now very comfortably settled in the metropolis. This gentleman was captured early in the war; he was of a cheerful, jocose disposition, and had a talent for learning the language, and imitating the manners of the French. He was upon a friendly footing with all the officers of the regiment, whose *dépôt* was Verdun, as well as with their families, and had the *entrée* into the Citadel whenever he pleased, night or day. He was their surgeon-in-chief; they preferred his advice to that of their own countrymen."

It happened that the gentleman responsible for Dr. Barklimore had gone home; and he had, by some oversight, no other "bondsman," and only waited a chance

<sup>1</sup> O'Brien, *Narrative*, Vol. 2, p. 53.

"Mr. Barklimore was captured on 10th August 1802, on board the *Diamond*, West Indiaman, Captain Clark, off the coast of Ireland, returning from the West Indies, by *La Bellone*, a large ship-privateer, from Bordeaux, mounting upwards of thirty guns, and having on board 300 men, Monsieur Pierand, commander. . . . This gentleman is at present a surgeon of reputation in Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury."

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, *Picture of Verdun*, vol. 2, p. 260.

"An Irishman, who on his way to India had been taken by the French and sent to Verdun, was a perfect master of the Irish bagpipes."

to be off himself. The French officers had fitted him out, and generously helped him once to escape; but the risk of the galleys was too great, if he were taken with a false passport; and Barklimore gave up this attempt. Then Ellison and K—— agreed to join him in some better and less hazardous way of escape. At first, Ellison dreaded the undertaking and would say to himself on waking, “this is a pretty sort of day (cold and wet), for a man to take up his lodging in a wood.” Then there was the fear of being shot or cut down; but anticipation proved worse to bear than reality.

“Our intention was to make for Trieste. Barklimore made many efforts to extract by acids the endorsements on Cecil’s passport, and succeeded in all but one, and that one rendered it useless.” . . . Still, maps were bought, the route was marked out. They also purchased gimlets and small lock-saws, “together with one fine one, made out of a watch-spring, and nicely set in a steel frame, for the purpose of cutting steel bars: these we sewed in the crowns of our hats.” Knapsacks of strong linen, covered with fine oil-cloth were also made, and shoulder-capotes. All, with a spare shirt and provisions, were deposited “in the spot whence Cecil departed.”

“And now I shall introduce John Innis, late purser of H.M.S. *Ranger*; a man who, for sterling worth, unbounded generosity according to his means, and staunchness of friendship, could not be surpassed in the *dépôt*. In the lodging of this worthy fellow we deposited all our things, leaving only empty trunks in the lodgings we proposed to evacuate. I have now on my table a snuff-box, a parting present from poor Cecil, which Innis (whose remains are now mouldering in the church-yard of Festiniog, North Wales), delivered into my hands seven years after I bade him adieu at Verdun.

“He was the last man we called upon to bid farewell;

(late at night); he had previously begged so hard that we would take a fellow lodger of his (named Robert Alison, a purser in the Indian service), with us, that we could not say nay, although it was sadly against our inclination, three being a sufficient number."

They then planned to miss the morning *appel*, calculating upon being shut up in the Citadel, "by which means our fellow-bondsmen would be exonerated." K—— had come to Ellison's lodgings; and "we lapped the rope, previously prepared, round our bodies; it was about the thickness of a log-line, or what will be better understood by landsmen and the fair sex, the thickness of window-blind cords; this we doubled, and marled together, that is, tied it round and round. Thus equipped, with our marching clothes on, with saws and gimlets in our hats, we sallied out and breakfasted in one of the villages, till the time for *appel* was past." Here was an unexpected hitch, as the *gendarmes* knew them to be of good character, and were inclined to be lenient over this transgression. But finally K—— and Ellison were shut up in the former Convent of the Citadel, Alison being put in another part. About five, Ellison bored holes close together round one of the panels of a door leading from the convent into an adjacent church used only as a store-room. He left one space uncut, and filled the nicks with tallow sprinkled with ashes.

Eight o'clock was bed-time, and they lay down without coats, anxious for the two-hourly visit of the *gendarmes*. Having seen a light glide by the door, K—— and Ellison crept out to call Alison. Then Ellison put his hand against the loose panel, which, to his surprise, made a loud noise when it broke off, but caused no alarm. He and K—— were through in a moment, but the big Alison stuck fast in the hole, crying lustily, as loud as he dared, "Pull, pull!" which they did, with all their strength. Crossing



the church, they blundered noisily in the dark, and caused the guard to be turned out; but soon all was quiet, and they climbed through an unglazed window and climbed down six or seven feet to the ground. Thence they dropped quietly into the Convent garden, unroofed the tiles from the top of a wall; and, as the clocks struck one, the "last of us was descending into the open Citadel, where we found Barklimore laid snugly his whole length along the bottom of the wall." The night was dark, and the meetings with sentinels were alarming and confusing; and they missed the spot fixed on for a descent of about thirty-five feet, and descended about sixty-five at least in the end.

"We had previously cast lots which was to be the last, which K—— drew. Alison being the most fortunate, went first; then Barklimore—both of whom, though landsmen, descended safely; then came my turn," says Ellison, "but K—— begged for the preference, to which I conceded. When I began to descend, I found the cord so stretched—by the three who had preceded me all being heavy men—and so smoothed down and slimy was it, that I could not support my weight, so that I must either have my hands cut through, or let go my hold—which latter I did, when I supposed I had descended fifteen to twenty feet. I fell flat upon my back among the rubbish, and heard K—— cry out 'Ellison is killed!' but I soon undeceived him by jumping on my feet."

They got out of the *fossé*, and made the best of their way to their storehouse, K—— and Ellison walking in great pain; the latter, when they arrived at the hiding-place, on stooping for his knapsack, fainted, but soon recovered. Having eaten and drunk and rested, at daylight they moved farther into the wood, and at about five, heard the gun. But no searcher came very near. K—— found both his ankles so strained, he also having let go of the rope, that he could hardly stand. Instead of

leeches, Barklimore applied his lancet, and bled them in different places; he then examined Ellison's back and found it much discoloured, and it was very painful. So there they lay for four days. The third night, Ellison was well enough to go with Barklimore to fill their canteens at a stream. On the fifth night, K——'s ankles being "something stronger," they left the wood and reached the river Meuse, in the middle of which was a small island, connected by bridges to a village on each side. They passed through one, apparently asleep; but when they reached the first bridge the church bell tolled an alarm. Running to gain the other bridge, they were met by pistol shots, and the villagers were all up, sounding their horns. They were now "in the toil," enemies before and behind, the river on each side, and "none of them swimmers." But running along the bank, they found a boat and were across in a moment and beyond pursuit. At daylight they found imperfect shelter in a wood. They had food for eighteen days—one and one half inches of thick Bologna sausage, a quarter of a pound of bread, and two mouthfuls of brandy (measured in a shaving-brush case), was the daily allowance. As they walked on, they only met two individuals. One directed them without questions, and the other took them for conscripts and begged them to shelter in his poor cottage. This being out of the question, he went with them three miles; they gave him a drink of brandy; "he shook hands all round, wished us well out of the country, and bid us good-night."

On the eleventh day they hid in a wood on the edge of a precipice, too steep for lying in. "We sat against the roots of the trees, wet, cold and hungry. The previous night we had passed over very little ground, K——'s ankles failing him; and he was worn as thin as a whipping-post." About half-past ten that night they ventured to enter the small town of Charmes, but were soon hailed by a *gendarme*

demanding passports. Barklimore tried to "put him off with some testimonials out of his pocket. 'You have never seen such passports,' said he, 'and you a *gendarme*? And you dare to stop gentlemen in the street, without being able to read their passports; and are, moreover, so ignorant as not to know that of late all passports have been issued at Paris in a new form'." But here a brigadier appeared, "and very good-humouredly said, 'Ah, gentlemen, I am glad to see you; I have been expecting you for above a week'." and read out their names and description. They made the best of it, ordered a meal and invited brigadier and *gendarme* to partake, which they did.

"After supper, the officer asked how much money we had? We told him, 'Very little.' 'Well,' said he 'although it is a breach of my duty, I shall not deprive you of it; neither shall I search you; you will find the need of it.' He explained that we must, however, be lodged in the town prison. 'I am extremely sorry to be the instrument; but you know the nature of the service; and you will not think I treat you more harshly than my duty requires'."

Early next morning the return journey began, under a strong escort. "At St Mihiel<sup>1</sup> we rested a day, in the most comfortable prison I ever abode in," Ellison says; "and had the range of it, and even the privilege of sitting with the jailor and jailoress—two very good sort of people."

On entering the town of Verdun, they found all their friends waiting to receive them, but no words were allowed. They "made but a sorry appearance," being paraded through the streets into the Citadel and lodged in the *Tour d'Angoulême*, a small round building with two apart-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Blayney, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 240.

St Mihiel, 7 leagues from Verdun on the banks of the Meuse. Seat of criminal and other superior courts of the department, also the common jail and a barracks of *gendarmes*. Lord Blayney's description also includes an account of a valuable library in this town.

ments and a circular outside staircase. Barklimore was put below, the others above. They were searched but managed to retain some money. Ellison had five double *louis* sewed inside his flannel waistcoat, and one under the arm of his coat. Still, they lost about sixty *louis*, knives, razors (in spite of entreaties) and pocket handkerchiefs. Next morning, as they were marched past Barklimore's window, he called, "Say nothing of me." They were led to the rampart where the breastwork had fallen, and confessed that they had descended there. "It was frightful to look down, after having fallen nearly from the top; it was the very highest part on that side of the Citadel, and appeared double the height of the spot where we had intended to descend." The Lieutenant (Demanget) then examined them, and becoming very angry with Ellison's replies, ordered him to be put in irons, hand and foot.

"The examination concluded, we were put into the lower apartment with Barklimore, who was, and had been all night, in irons. He was in a most distressing plight, being scarcely able to express how he had been tortured by fleas, so much so, that he hardly expected to survive until morning. He could not defend nor scratch himself, his hands being fettered; and what made it still worse, he had put them lengthways into the irons, instead of cross-wise. Having heard his pitiable tale, we prevailed on the gaoler (an old acquaintance . . .) to sell us a besom, and lend us a spade and two or three buckets. We all, save Barklimore, set to work and carried out all the litter, which had been straw some eight or ten years past. Having swept the place clean, the sentinel accompanied us backwards and forwards to the well, and we gave the floor, guard-bed, and walls a good rinsing, which quieted the enemy for the time we remained there. Then, by dint of large promises—for it was presumed we had no money—we prevailed on him to bring us some straw; and thus

we had a pretty fair lodging-house; a little damp or so, but that did not affect us."

The jailer announced later that the General, "out of his wondrous clemency," had ordered them to be given everything they chose to eat, and pay for, but only one small bottle of wine a day; no brandy, "lest they should be riotous." The guard who attended the jailer with victuals favoured them by setting hands and feet at liberty; and the jailer, when he turned the screws again, would say, "Now, Monsieur E——, do not let me hurt you, tell me when the screw is low enough." Ellison explains that he had a trick whereby his hands were at liberty as soon as the jailer left. "Not so with poor Barklimore; his irons were of a different description—no manœuvring could get them off. He told us the General was present at his examination . . . much enraged . . . because he was liable to censure for having a prisoner without security of parole or by bondsmen." They tried to prove him the *chef du complot*. The irons on the legs of the two prisoners weighed about eight pounds; "we could shuffle about a little, advancing two or three inches at a step, which enabled us to get at the window to breathe the fresh air, on the sill of which we could lay our whole length. Occasionally we saw our friends at a distance, but the sentinel would not allow us to speak, and pen, ink and paper were forbidden."

In the middle of the eighth night sounds of voices and cartwheels were heard by the prisoners. The doors were unlocked and four armed *gendarmes* marched in; Ellison had scarcely time to put on his irons.

"What's this?" they cried.

"*Allons, Messieurs, en route.*" "Where to? What are you going to do with us?"

"Ask no questions but come along directly."

"Are you not first going to take off these *bêtises*?"

asked Ellison, looking at the irons. "*Bêtises*, do you call them? We will inquire about that."

Their limbs were freed, and they, having no toilette to make, were then ready. They were led out and placed in a covered wagon, having four seats, a prisoner and *gendarme* on each, and were told their destination was Bitche. The orders were to show no lenity and to lodge them in prison at the halting-places. But the guards promised them reasonable liberty, if they took no wrong advantage of such kindness.

"We accepted their conditions and gave our word that they should have no cause of complaint; they believed us, and we travelled like gentlemen, parading the towns where we stopped, and seeing all the lions, each of us with a liveried servant at his heels.

"On our way we met fourteen of our countrymen chained together, among whom were some old acquaintances, Messrs. Tuthill, Ashworth and Brine, marching jovially along, hallowing and singing, with as much apparent joy as if they were on their way homewards. 'Where are you going?' we asked. 'To Metz.' 'What for?' 'To be tried for setting the *souterrain* on fire, and attempting to blow up the magazine.'

". . . We arrived at Bitche the third day, distance about 120 miles; . . . we had to pay each *gendarme* six francs and the officer twelve per day, both going and returning, as well as the expense of the wagon.

"The fortress of Bitche<sup>1</sup> is situated about ten leagues north of Strasburg, in the midst of a valley upon a rock about one thousand feet above the sea level. It is ascended on one side by a zig-zag foot-path, and on the other by a carriage road, winding round, and ascending gradually till both meet at a drawbridge, that communicates with an inclined plane raised upon arches, leading to the gate

<sup>1</sup> Seacome Ellison, pp. 73-75.

at the entrance of the fort, the approaches to which are exposed to a battery of ten pieces of heavy artillery. The entrance is by a tunnel, cut through the rock, 120 feet long, having a massy gate at each end, and one in the centre. The rock has been cut through in two places, as low as the ditch; one extremity called the *grosse tête*, the other the *petite tête*; both connected to the body of the fort by drawbridges. The whole is capable of mounting about forty pieces of cannon. On the west side, forty or fifty feet lower than the upper part, is a mortar battery; this I traversed in making my escape, but from the darkness of the night did not observe it. In the centre of the fort stand two large barracks, and at the two ends storehouses and magazines. The rock is excavated to a considerable extent, sufficient to contain the whole garrison, provisions, etc., and divided into compartments, connected by narrow passages, secured by doors, some of iron, and some of wood; there is also a subterraneous passage, which communicates with the town. Although this fort is formed of solid rock, cut down perpendicularly, 90 to 150 feet deep, yet it is faced all round with masonry, except a small portion that juts out and runs along, about the centre. The expense of constructing it was so great, that it is said when Louis XIV was applied to for the money to complete it, he inquired if they were building it of *louis*."

The account of the capture of the "chain-gang prisoners" is given by Captain O'Brien in his *Narrative*. He contrived to escape capture himself.

A writer in the *Naval Chronicle* gives "a correct copy" of the sentence passed upon the "*souterrain* prisoners." Here is a list of their names:

Henry Ashworth, midshipman.

Christopher Tuthill, midshipman.

George Hall Dacre, midshipman of H.M. late ship

*La Minerve* (Captain Brenton) stranded near Cherbourg, and taken. (He finally escaped with Seacome Ellison.)

George Potts, midshipman of H.M. sloop *Vincego* (Captain Wesley Wright).

George Brine, captain of a merchantman. (He finally escaped with Ashworth and Tuthill).

Walter Adams, captain of a merchant ship.

John Daly, purser in the navy. (He escaped safely.)

Joseph Giles, master R.N.

Charles Roberts, a merchant.

John Light, a seaman who waited on Messrs. Ashworth and Tuthill. Ashworth, Dacre, Adams, Tuthill, Brine and Light, "were charged with being the principals of a conspiracy of *evasion* or *desertion*, which had taken place on the nights of 17th and 18th of July last, in the *souterrains* of the English officers detained in the fortress of Bitché."

The others were charged with being "the principal incendiaries in an attempt (made on the same nights) to set on fire one of the *souterrains* of the said fortress of Bitché."

Subsequently, Ashworth, Dacre, Brine, Adams and John Light were sentenced "to serve as slaves in the galleys for *fifteen years*, and Christopher Tuthill for *ten years*, as they supposed him the least culpable." The four other men were "sentenced to serve as slaves in the galleys for *nine years*." "The Counsel for the accused were Messrs. Mangay and Mangier, Counsellors, residents at Metz. . . . Their counsel used most powerful and eloquent language and arguments in their favour ; pointed out the inconsistency of suspecting people who were barred in and secured upwards of thirty-five feet underground, of setting fire to the place they themselves were in, without a probability of getting out; and dwelt upon the very great severity of condemning young officers and gentlemen in



the prime of life to be slaves, for simply endeavouring to regain their liberty, and return to their native country.

"But at the moment these unfortunate young gentlemen were on the point of being marched to their destination, an order from Paris came to repeal their sentence, and to reconduct them to the fortress of Bitche."

Seacome Ellison, who met them on the road giving such a "frolic welcome" to their fate, later relates their attempt at escape, but neither he nor O'Brien says any word about a fire. Ellison had probably heard from one of the accused men the speech of the president of the Court, which he quotes:

"Gentlemen, for your sakes and that of your country I have given you a fair trial, in order to show you that you stand legally condemned; but, as a portion of you are British officers, I, to show the respect I have for your honourable profession, shall not put the law in force: you are all pardoned, and I trust you will never again be guilty of the same offence; if you are, you must not expect the same lenity."

"In consequence of this appeal, Mr. Ashworth and his companions," says the *Naval Chronicle*, "were accordingly re-conducted in chains to pass the remainder of their imprisonment (which circumstantially viewed presented a period of equal duration with the war) in the horrid dungeons of Bitche."

But we shall see that under the generous rule of Commandant Clement, this bitter punishment was somewhat mitigated.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### FINAL ESCAPE OF DENNIS O'BRIEN, MIDSHIPMAN HEWSON, DR. BARKLIMORE AND MR. BATLEY. SEACOME ELLISON AT BITCHE

"WE arrived at Bitche [from Verdun] the third day," says Ellison, "distance about 120 miles; had we been conducted according to the regular routine, we should have been eight [days]. We had to pay each *gendarme* six francs and the officer twelve per day, both going and returning, as well as the expense of the waggon." He then gives a short description of the Fortress.

"After our friendly *gendarmes* had given us into the safe keeping of Commandant Clement, we were ordered into what was named the little *souterrain*, the descent into which was by thirty-one steps; here we found twenty of our countrymen, chiefly masters of merchant-ships, and midshipmen; and in one near it, called the *grand souterrain*, 170 British seamen. We hired bed, bedding and towels, out of the town, at the rate of six *francs* per month; bought a few cooking utensils, plates, etc., and soon became habituated to our new quarters, which were less objectionable than we were led to expect. Provisions were cheap—butter's meat seven *sous* a pound; good bread, two; a goose, twenty-two; a roasting pig, eighteen; potatoes plentiful, and cheap in proportion, most of which things were exposed for sale every morning at the gate. Beside, we had the privilege, in turn, of going to the market-town three times a week in summer, and twice in winter, but always well guarded. The butcher's, the baker's, the grocer's, and the wine-shop, were all near together in the main street, across which, at each extremity of the shops,

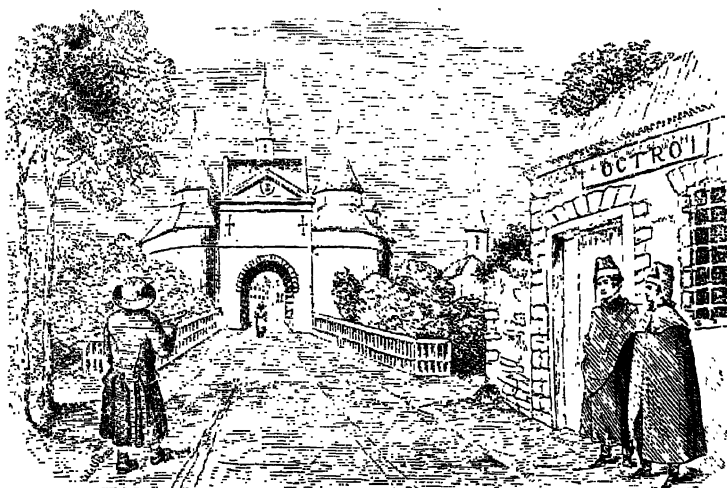
the *gendarmes* stationed themselves, and waited until our purchases were completed, and then marched us back again. We were regularly mustered three times a day, and counted down at night. In summer, locked up at eight o'clock in the evening, and unlocked at six in the morning; in winter, at four in the afternoon, and eight in the morning. After having been here a little time, the Commandant returned our watches and money, less twenty-five louis, which had been retained for travelling expenses, *gendarmes'* pay, etc. Here Barklimore and myself were attacked with intermittent fever, with which I had been attacked the same month the previous year. Then it was that we felt some of the disagreeables and annoyances of our confinement. Often, during the hot stage, we were almost distracted with the noises around us—dancing upon the benches, singing, carousing, etc. It was useless complaining; there was nothing for us but to bear it patiently. Barklimore, owing to a recommendation from some of the military at Verdun, was soon removed upstairs into a room, where, it afterwards appeared, the parties were ready to decamp."

The original narrative of Lieutenant O'Brien was published in the *Naval Chronicle*. In 1839 the Captain republished and enlarged the narrative under his family name of Donat Henchy O'Brien.<sup>1</sup> His adventures have been widely read in Sir Charles Oman's scholarly edition<sup>2</sup> and reprinted and retold more than once. He was a dashing, determined prison-breaker, and "endured hardness" with grim persistence, complete selfishness, and desperate courage. His story is linked with that of others in this book.

<sup>1</sup> *My Adventures during the late War, etc.*, by Donat Henchy O'Brien, Esq., Captain, R.N. 1839.

<sup>2</sup> New Edition by Charles Oman, 1902.

Also Commander V. Lovett Cameron, R.N., *Log of a Jack Tar, etc.*, with *O'Brien's Captivity in France*, introduction and notes, 1891. Edward Fraser, *Napoleon the Gaoler*, 1914, pp. 247-252. Tighe Hopkins, *Romance of Escapes*, 1920.



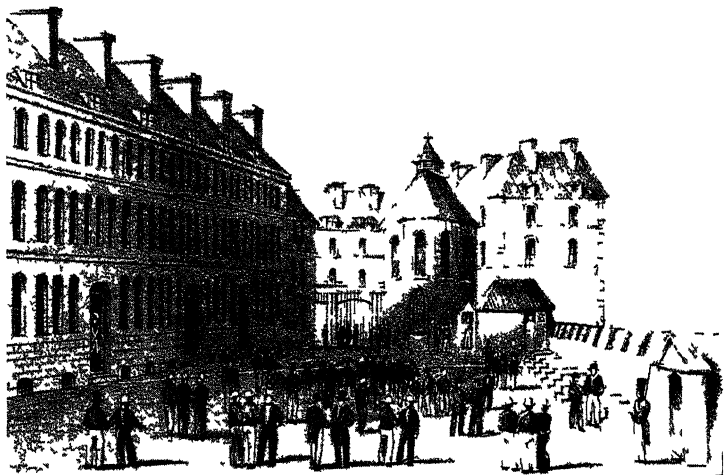
The author entering the gate of Bruges, preceded by Madame Derikre

See page 95



The souterrain at Bitche, Dormitory of the prisoners

See page 127



Courtyard of Fort of Bitche, Promenade of prisoners, etc. (White line—track of fugitives)

See page 141

After six years' service as midshipman, O'Brien passed for a lieutenancy in 1803. He afterwards became master's mate on H.M.S. frigate *Hussar*, 38 guns, Captain Wilkinson. On 8th February 1804, this frigate, bound for England from Spain and carrying dispatches, was wrecked on the Saints' Isles and had to be destroyed by fire. An attempt was made in ships and fishing boats to reach the fleet off Brest or the coast of England. The Captain and some others eventually arrived in England, but, owing to severe weather, the other boats had to make a forced landing on the French coast. O'Brien was in charge of one, and Midshipman Robert James Gordon<sup>1</sup> of another.

In every prison there must be a minority to whom the mere fact of confinement and restraint causes mental distress and suffering beyond that felt by more normally constituted people. Most of the captured officers felt deeply the break in their careers, and were eager and ambitious to serve their country again, to gain honour and also promotion. Many of the midshipmen, though they had time on their side, also felt anxiety and waste of energy, and took pride in keeping themselves physically hard and in good condition. They also studied languages in preparation for better fortune.

After three years at Verdun, O'Brien became restless and unhappy and constantly brooded on his fate.

The smouldering misery flamed up in him when a plan for escape was unfolded to him by Midshipmen Henry Ashworth and Tuthill, of the *Hussar*, high-spirited youths, weary of inaction and cruel restrictions. They were joined by Lieutenant Essel "of the Navy," a friend of O'Brien's.

The escape took place on the night of 29th August 1807, in a few seconds, down a rampart about 72 feet high. The rope had long been prepared, and they had the help of a friend, and all reached the ditch safely. They ran

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vii.

until dawn, and then sheltered in a thick wood. And thus began the first bitter, furtive journey for O'Brien, Ashworth, and Tuthill<sup>1</sup>; for Essel, the first and last; he was destined to meet a violent death. They were recaptured at Étaples on 18th September.

O'Brien's most unfortunate companions, Midshipmen Ashworth and Tuthill, were associated with him in two more attempted escapes; one on the road to Bitche, the other in the *grand souterrain* of Bitche, a disastrous affair.

Captain O'Brien was now completing his plans for a fourth (and successful) escape. His companions were Mr. Hewson, a midshipman, Dr. Barklimore, and Mr. Batley, a Dragoon officer in the East Company's service, captured at sea. Mr. Hewson and Mr. Butterfield had previously escaped from Verdun but were recaptured, and had recently arrived at Bitche. On the part of Dr. Barklimore, this tramp was an heroic feat. He had had a severe attack of fever or ague before he started, and was so weak that O'Brien hardly expected him to get through the long journey, its privations and exposure. A few days after he had quitted the *souterrain*, Ellison says: "Barklimore came down to see me. But so altered in his behaviour, I could not imagine what had caused the change—he might have had St. Vitus' dance, capering about, laughing and joking—things which of late had been rather unusual with him. 'What's the matter with you, Barklimore? tell me.' 'O, you shall know,' he replied; 'I will tell you some of these days'; then, shaking hands, he exclaimed, 'Good-bye,' and away he flew, leaving me in amazement. At daylight, next morning, a gun was fired, and when our door was opened, we learned he was off with O'Brien, late a mate in the *Hussar* frigate, now

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Tuthill, midshipman on H.M.S. *L'Impétueuse*, was taken prisoner with part of H.M. late ship *Magnificent's* crew, on the island of Beniquet, near Brest, where through the badness of the weather, and boats being stove, he was obliged to seek an asylum.

Captain, R.N., Hewson, a midshipman, and Batley, an officer in the East India service, now no more."

It was at dusk on the evening of 14th September 1808, that the sentinel entered his box and O'Brien crept out to fasten the rope and make the descent.

It was Hewson's and Barklimore's second attempt, Batley's first, and O'Brien's fourth. So O'Brien was taking no risks, and constituted himself absolute leader. All expressed satisfaction and began the long journey, "the course directed by the stars due east," which was to end at Trieste on 31st October.

After crossing the Rhine, Batley, who had previously lost a shoe, was lame and utterly worn out. He was left, almost penniless and ignorant of the language of his hosts. He was nursed by them and later escaped to England after a most harassing journey. Dr. Barklimore struggled on in spite of relapsing fever and ague. Sometimes he had a lift from some kindly waggoner, and, in the last weary stages in a diligence. From the jolting on rough mountain roads, "our sick friend must have suffered dreadfully," says O'Brien, "but he bore his pains with his usual fortitude and self-command." And so Trieste was reached at last. A year later, Trieste and also Fiume were in the hands of Napoleon. O'Brien put a letter in the post for Tuthill and Ashworth "in the real German character, giving them a minute detail of the course we had taken, and all particulars relative to our successes, which they fortunately received, and which afterwards enabled them to escape."

The escape of O'Brien and his three companions produced a great impression at Bitche. There had been at any rate two well-known attempts before, which are related by Ellison and Joshua Done (whose *Narrative* will appear later). Lieut. Essel and five others, Worth, Brine, Mason, Potts and Adams, managed to get one of



the iron bars of the grating loose in the dungeon of the *grosse tête*, and were about to descend the rampart by a rope tied to another bar. The sergeant, coming to relieve the sentinels, fell over it, and they, alarmed, went down the rope quickly, so that it snapped. Essel was killed in falling, but according to O'Brien and Ellison he was not, as a later legend states, shot and rifled of his money. Worth and Brine appear to have been seized by guards on the embrasure before their descent. Mason strained both ankles, Potts had concussion of the brain, and Adams was severely bruised. Potts, Brine and Adams were in the court-martial at Metz with Ashworth. After six weeks, Ellison and his companions were permitted to occupy the room in the barracks which their fortunate countrymen, Messrs. O'Brien and his companions had evacuated, "when," says Ellison, "they bade adieu to sentinels, *souterrains*, dungeons and barrack-rooms. . . . A well-secured padlock was placed on the door, and a sentinel placed where they had descended, and other precautions taken, that made it, in our opinion, madness to think of following in their steps until favoured by dark nights and severe weather; until which time we were constantly scheming how to effect a second escape.

"I have heard it said that Wirion once remarked, that the *détenus* were the sweepings of England, and that the masters of merchant ships were the sweepings of the sweepings. Then let the reader suppose that the inhabitants of Bitche were the sweepings of the sweepings, and he may form some idea of the character of its inhabitants. I do not mean to imply that they were all bad—there were some excellent ones, save their being determined prison-breakers. Still it was the place where were congregated the dissolute, the abandoned, the profligate, the drunken, the reckless, the debtor, the refuse of the other *dépôts*.

"... Notwithstanding, Bitche was the best *dépôt* in France for the seamen; they were allowed as much firewood as they could burn, a pound of bread, half a pound of beef [a day], six *sous* every five days, and occasionally some vegetables.

"Their great bane was *snique*, a cheap spirit said to be made from potatoes; yet although they were drunken, and the *souterrain* damp, there was but little sickness and few deaths.

"... The seamen that were industrious waited upon the officers. One of them, Barnes, an active, lively fellow, had been made a prisoner during the Duke of York's expedition. He, and ten or twelve more, in attempting to escape, either accidentally or designedly killed a *gendarme*, and were soon after retaken; but as no positive proof could be brought against them to affect their lives, they were sent to the galleys (something similar I believe to our hulks), where they lay upon bare boards, heavily ironed, and badly fed.

"Barnes, being clever at his trade (I think that of a sailmaker) was allowed to work at it, and earned as much by his extra labour as kept him tolerably well; and not only so, it served as a recreation of which the other poor fellows were deprived, not being equally clever. Their work was not so oppressive as their treatment was hard. Chained to the benches for a great portion of their time, without employments, or anything to relieve their mind from dwelling on their painful lot, they pined away.

"But the buoyant and active spirit of Barnes supported him throughout the term of his punishment. He was marching through the country to be set at liberty, when the war of 1802 broke out; and he was ordered to Bitche, where I left him, and where, most probably, he was detained until the end of the war.

"When the *dépôt* was first established, distinctions of

rank and character were unknown; all were confined together in the *grand souterrain*. Then, indeed, it deserved the name of the 'Place of Tears'; for, by what I heard of it, it was a pandemonium. If the sailors, and those confined with them, had been tameable animals, and would have studied their own welfare, they might have been comfortable; but they were indomitable, being a terror to their guards, who dreaded coming in contact with them.

"Commandant Clement," Ellison says, "was a worthy, indulgent officer; he had too much of the milk of human kindness in him, to punish those under his charge as they really deserved. He was unpleasantly situated; he could show no favour but what tended to facilitate our escape, which we were never backward to take advantage of, the first opportunity; and yet his generous mind could not bear to keep us underground, seeing we were in no otherwise deserving of punishment than for attempting to escape from confinement not recognised by the law of nations. I have often witnessed his great forbearance, and that of his *gendarmes*, and have as often thought that if the cases had been reversed, an English soldier would have used his bayonet, where a French soldier only shrugged his shoulders and looked on with calmness." Commandant Clement left Bitche in 1809.

As winter drew near, preparations were made for a second escape. Coarse linen was bought, as if for shirts and trousers, and carried into prison, a few yards at a time, to be made into ropes by night. "It is a true saying," Ellison remarks, "that no man knows what is in him, until something happens to bring it out. The barracks in which we were confined had two fronts, with a wall running lengthwise, through the centre, the staircases on opposite sides communicating by doors, which were fastened up. The side on which we lived had been so

well guarded by sentinels since the escape of O'Brien, that we deemed it impracticable to elude their vigilance."

But they were not posted on the other side till eight o'clock at night. There were now fourteen in the room, and Ellison's party, when ready, informed the others. All, except two, agreed to join in the attempt to escape. The two were Mason, still a cripple, and Midshipman Potts, suffering from fever. The names of the twelve appear to be: A—d—n, Alison, Ashworth, Brine, Butterfield, Dacre, Ellison, Peter K——, Simpson, Tuthill, Porteous and Worth. Ellison conceals names under initials, discreetly; "B——" for Midshipman Butterfield, and "Peter K——," whose name, in order to save the feelings of the Scotch families to whom he was related, never appears. It is concealed presumably not because he was a prisoner, but because he had been mate in a slaver. He is not mentioned by the naval officers. "A—d—n" may have been "Anderson."

After dark on 20th November 1808, the bolt in the inner lock was forced back; the clamp which secured the clasp outside gave more trouble, knives making small impression on the seasoned oak of the door. "Finding this to be the case, we put a stiff piece of iron within and across the key-hole of the box-lock to which we fastened the end of a strong cord. All getting hold of it, and making various hubbubs to drown the noise the door might make (for five *gendarmes* lived in the room under us), we gave a sudden pull, and open it flew. The way being clear, a working party ascended the stairs, whilst those in the room kept up a moderate noise."

The gimlet was found to be too small, and the time before sentinels were posted too short to complete the business. How were they to fasten themselves up again? "But the time for extinguishing lights having arrived, we turned in, some to devise the means, some to sleep, and

others to lie awake, brooding over the disappointment, and anticipating a removal to the dungeon, which seemed almost inevitable.

"We were not restricted to any hour of rising, and I, from the want of better employment, generally turned out early, made the fire, swept the room, and prepared the breakfast, so that our bestirring betimes the next morning was not observed." About six o'clock the lock was mended in such a way as to serve when the *gendarme* unlocked the padlock, and he retired as usual, the prisoners lying still in bed with a sensation between hope and fear, difficult to describe. They now knew that only a larger gimlet was needed to free them from the barrack, but knew not how to obtain it.

"Day after day went by, leaving us in the same critical state; during which time I had a letter from Boys, at Valenciennes, bringing the intelligence that he was going to be married, with the arrangements he had made for the ceremony. By this he meant to imply that he was upon the move. But [as] when I left him at Verdun, he had not made up his mind to decamp, [so] the metaphor was either not sufficiently pointed, or my head was too obtuse to comprehend it; therefore, presuming that the plain reading was the correct one, I endeavoured, in my best manner, to point out his folly, and persuade him from it; and, in a postscript added, that I had had a new coat made, but that I could not wear it for want of the right sort of buttons.

"A gentleman named Dale, retaken after his escape from Verdun some years before, having regained his character, and having friends at Court, was living on parole in the town [of Bitche] and was allowed to range about at pleasure . . . he met our wishes in the handsomest manner, and smuggled a gimlet into the fort; that was the very thing for our purpose. All was

now in readiness, and we only wanted a dark stormy night.

"A large stone, suitable for tying the rope to, was played about with, and no suspicions aroused; it was finally placed on the spot chosen for our descent."

## CHAPTER XV

### FINAL ESCAPE OF MIDSHIPMEN HENRY ASHWORTH, CHRISTOPHER TUTHILL, CAPTAIN GEORGE BRINE, AND DR. PORTEOUS, SURGEON R.N., FROM BITCHE

THE names of Ashworth and Tuthill are allied in friendship and adventure, but the narrative by Ashworth of their final escape from Bitche is unfinished, and as brief as Ashworth's own life, which was cut off when he was twenty-six years of age.

Four of the party of twelve escaped successfully—Ashworth, Tuthill, Captain George Brine, who had been tried and sentenced at Metz, and Dr. Porteous, a naval surgeon. A letter written home by Ashworth tells his part of the story.

It should be noted that the escaping men wore shoes of the customary naval pattern of the time; but the original shoes must have been replaced in most cases by local shoemakers. In their second attempted escape, Ellison wore a new pair of shoes, but Peter K——'s shoe-heels "kept coming down," and delayed the party. At the end of the long march made by Ellison and Dacre, their shoes were "in a sorry state," and had finally to be tied on, and caused painful walking. Mr. Batley's troubles

in his escape with Captain O'Brien began with the loss of a shoe and ended in his being left by his party. Midshipman Ashworth descended the rope bare-foot with the escaping party from Bitche (as did Midshipman Tuthill, with an ankle sprained two days previously). But Ashworth lost a shoe in the descent, and also wounded his foot on the icy road the same night. The wound became so inflamed that he had to remain behind his party in a village near Wurtemberg. There he rested nine days and, being an excellent linguist, he travelled as a Swiss, and after innumerable hairbreadth escapes finally arrived at Trieste.

Henry Ashworth died of wounds received during the storming and taking of Tarragona in July 1811. Christopher Tuthill served under Captain O'Brien on the *Slaney* in 1818. He died in Dublin in 1837.

The narrative of Midshipman R. B. James of the brig *Rambler* records an attempted escape from Verdun of "Dr. Wm. Porteous," of whom I have found no other mention.

Midshipman James was captured in a storm in 1804 while acting as prize-master in charge, with a quarter-master, of two small sloops, on their way to England. To the MS. of his narrative he proposed to add an account of his services as first lieutenant on H.M.S. *Revenge* in the Mediterranean; but he died in 1830. His narrative came into the possession of Mr. Edward Fraser and is reprinted in his book *Napoleon the Gaoler*. By his courtesy and that of his publishers, Messrs. Methuen, I am kindly given permission to quote briefly from this narrative.

It is a spirited story. James was ten years a captive. When he and his shipmates started from Nantes to Verdun, he says "the greatest novelty I saw was myself walking through the streets at the head of my men, handcuffed." Here, James and his handful of men, consisting of the

crews on the two poor prizes, the quartermaster and himself, twelve in all, made their long and difficult way to Verdun. He declares that the men drank "brandy-grog" at every opportunity, but also that "they invariably marched better when drunk than sober;—in one case—they would stagger, and roll along, either quarrelling or singing;—while on the other hand, they would move on as sulkey as mules, and only go by driving."

When the order was given to remove the midshipmen from Verdun to Sarrelibre, Valenciennes and Givet,<sup>1</sup> James had been for three years a prisoner there and confined, like many others of his rank at that time, for two years in the Citadel. He and his friend "Dr. Porteous" decided to escape and descended the ramparts on the evening of 8th October 1807.

The story of their travels ("Doctor and I kept on walking and talking") ended alas! at Ulm, where they were re-taken; and they were marched back to Verdun in irons, and fed upon bread and water. Indeed, for a time they were put with a chain-gang of "galley-slaves" who were chiefly deserters and conscripts.

After a month the two friends in misfortune were marched to Bitche. About seven leagues from Verdun a halt was made and the following incident, described by James, is the only personal anecdote that I have seen about Dr. Wm. Porteus [or Porteous].

When the two prisoners alighted in the evening from the cart, they found to their astonishment that their prison was under the Parish Church, in a vault. They hesitated, but were thrust forward by the gaoler and left to grope to a corner, where, instead of a bed of straw, they stumbled upon a heap of human bones. "We thought that it smelt deadly, but now it really felt so:—sailors of all persons in the world are the most superstitious:—and if we had a

<sup>1</sup> *Boys' Narrative*, p. 86.



horrible feeling on us at the moment, let any of our readers think themselves in our situation—then judge.

“It was fortunate for me that I had a doctor for my companion,—or I should not have slept a wink for the night;—it seemed to him a mine of wealth:—for during the long hours, I was obliged to listen to all the theory and practice of anatomy:—so that, by the morning, I was acquainted and quite familiar with the craniums and paraphernalia of our ghostly friends;—and only left the impression, that my own ribs and trucks [*sic*] would soon be like them.

“In the morning we again set out on our Journey; it was a clear sharp frosty morning, the two *gendarmes* were so good as to allow us to march without our Irons;—one of them was a kind and pleasant fellow,—full of good humour and anecdote. . . .’<sup>1</sup>

James was not destined, like Dr. Porteous, to escape, but spent happier days towards the end of his long captivity both at Verdun and Bitche, after his marriage. He finally reached England with his wife and new-born babe in 1814.

The spelling and picturesque punctuation of Lieutenant James were preserved by Mr. Fraser and are reprinted here.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ATTEMPTED ESCAPE OF SEACOME ELLISON AND FOUR OTHERS FROM BITCHE

ELLISON relates that “The 8th of December was a day to our mind—blowing hard, with sleet and snow. . . . The door of the room was opened as easily as the *gendarme* had

<sup>1</sup> *Napoleon the Gaoler*, pp. 136-7.

shut it." After bidding adieu to the two who were on the doctor's list, they went downstairs and darted across the yard, to the embrasure on the wall, where the rope was hanging.

Some of them, he says, descended so rapidly as to lacerate their hands, the rope having been thoughtlessly marled with hard twine. The drawbridge being down, it was crossed, and three parties were soon formed.

"We bade a hasty adieu to each other—commencing a dreary journey, beset with enemies, in which we had to combat the raging of the elements and the resentment of man—the wind howling in our ears, the sleet beating in our faces, and the blood trickling from our finger-ends. In the hurry of separating I found myself in a party of five [Peter K——, Dacre,<sup>1</sup> Butterfield and A—d—n]. The firing of the gun warned us to seek the woods. At daylight a scene presented itself that beggared description. I was the only one that had the use of my fingers, having escaped with two large blisters—both on the right hand: but my poor companions were in a dreadful state; some of their fingers were stripped to the bone, and none of them had scarcely any whole skin remaining on their hands.

"Here was a situation to be in—no plasters, no bandages, no comforts of any sort, save a bladder of brandy that I had secured—exposed to the elements, with no covering but the leafless trees, and the canopy of heaven! My task was an arduous one, for I had to do almost everything for them; and began by cutting off the laps of their shirts, and binding up their fingers, which I did as well as my materials would permit, having neither needles, nor thread; nor pins, nor anything, save the linen, to keep the cold from their wounds; in fact, we were starving both within and without. K—— had charge of a ham, which he was carrying down the wall in his teeth, but unfortunately lost it, and

<sup>1</sup> Ellison spells the name Dacres, the *Naval Chronicle* Dacre.

we found ourselves with only a piece of a loaf and the brandy. I had a new pair of shoes and a pair of warm stockings in my pockets, which I put on, expecting they would have warmed my feet; but in that I was sadly deceived, for they became much colder afterwards than they were before, and were so benumbed, that I was unconscious, during the whole day, if I had feet at all. I never suffered anything like it, however wet or cold the weather.

"At the edge of dark" the party rose with difficulty and stretched their benumbed limbs. A man at his cottage door declared he had nothing for himself but potatoes; he pointed out the road to Strasbourg, thought they had chosen bad weather for their journey, and said good-night. "The road we were on was bad—in many places knee-deep in mud—poor K—— often calling out, 'O, Ellison, put up my shoe-heel'; and I, exerting my patience, as often put it up; until at last I inadvertently used one of my wounded fingers, which tore off the blister; and then I could not help showing some of the infirmity of my disposition.

"We passed a number of foundries, which illuminated our way, and about eleven o'clock came to the small town of Niederbrun, which we at first took for a straggling village. While considering how to proceed, one of our companions was seized suddenly with violent pain, and lay motionless in the middle of the road."

It was freezing keenly and to leave him was certain death; so Dacre and Ellison volunteered to reconnoitre in the town.

They found a tailor working at his lighted window. He pointed out a wine-house, but did not understand French. "Are there any *gendarmes*?" they asked. "*Nichts the gendarmes*," he replied.

They now found their companion somewhat better, and

all went on to the village, promising to stop at some lonely wine-house with the sick man. At a solitary house a civil French-speaking landlord brought some supper. When he saw Ellison cutting the meat for the others, he asked the reason. They said they were escaping conscripts. "Although we were nearly famished when we entered the house, the heat of the stove made the room so oppressively hot, that it turned us all sick, and destroyed our appetites." The landlord pitied them, said they were seven leagues from the Rhine, and procured a guide, who promised to put them across the Rhine before daylight.

Much inspirited they set out again and soon passed round the ramparts of Hagenau. The guide now took them across marshes and through woods all in moonlight, and over frozen shallow water. But K—— (a most unfortunate companion to escape with) fell into deep water.

Upon their coming to a barn, two men who were threshing by candlelight promised to shelter them till nightfall, for two crowns. About half-past three they were discovered by a man and woman, who accused them of being thieves. They were told that the whole village had been roused, and were conducted to a house where they found the mayor and a posse of villagers. But the good woman pointed with her finger to another door; they took the hint and bolted.

Although they were chased, they soon lost sight of the pursuers and entered a wood a little before dark. "I had run with my shoes in my hand," says Ellison, "by which means I bruised one of my feet and scratched the ankle, which afterwards laid me up." They were now starving and perished with cold. A well-armed man came up on horseback, and K—— accused him of being a *gendarme*. "I will tell you plainly" said K——, "that we are Englishmen; and if you attempt to obstruct, or betray us, we will murder you."

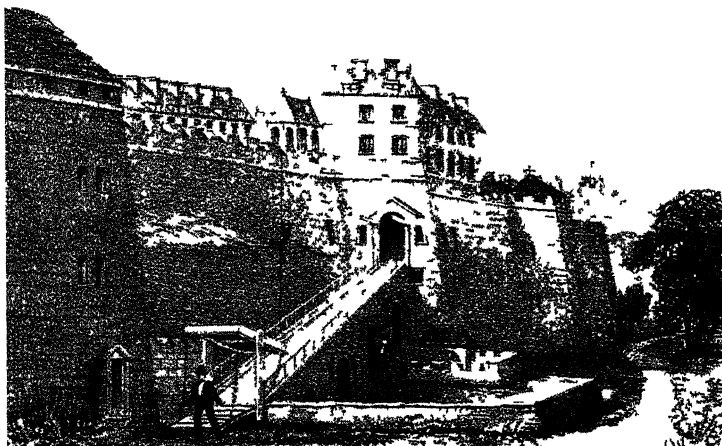
The man protested that he was a *douanier*.<sup>1</sup> He then consented to put the Englishmen across the Rhine, but demanded fifteen *louis*, as he was a poor man and would risk his situation. He acted his part so well that the Englishman began to waver, and upon voting, K—, Dacre and Butterfield were in favour of accepting his offer and marched away with the horseman.

"In a little time we crossed a bridge, and coming to a house near it, the fellow called out 'Tuez-moi ces coquins-ci' [kill me these rascals], and drawing his sword, made a cut at K—."

Out started twenty or thirty armed men, some mounted some on foot, calling for surrender. A—d—n and Ellison, being more suspicious than the rest, had kept behind and now ran away. But after some hours both were captured. Ellison was taken in the act of casting a boat loose on the shores of the Rhine, and A—d—n in crawling, half frozen, from an icy ditch.

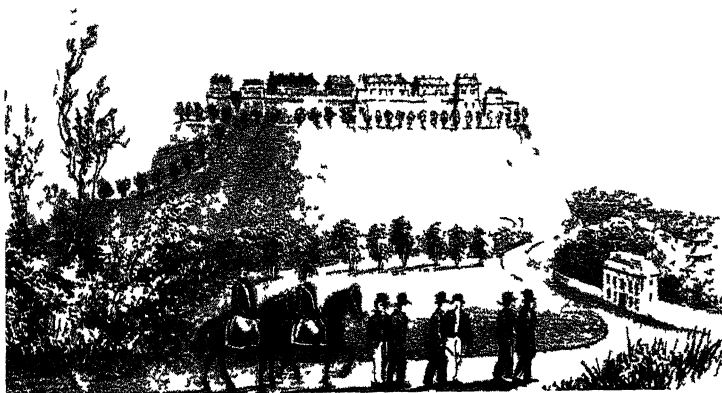
"Although the *gendarmes* had made a great flourish with their sabres, none of the party were hurt. K— eluded the sabre-cut made at him by slipping under the horse's head. The jailer was tolerably kind, gave us some clean straw and something to eat and drink. At daylight the brigadier and his wife paid us a visit, and she dressed all our wounds, bemoaning most piteously our hard fate. Soon after, a cart filled with straw came to the prison door. We were placed thereon, the good woman lending us a blanket to keep us warm. After many thanks we bade her adieu, her worthy husband and two *gendarmes* accompanying us. He went with us merely to see that we were well treated. . . . Arriving at the correspondence house, he kindly recommended us to his brother officer, but he would not accept anything; neither could we prevail on him to dine with us; therefore, bidding a cordial adieu, we parted.

<sup>1</sup> *Douaniers*, or Custom-house officers.



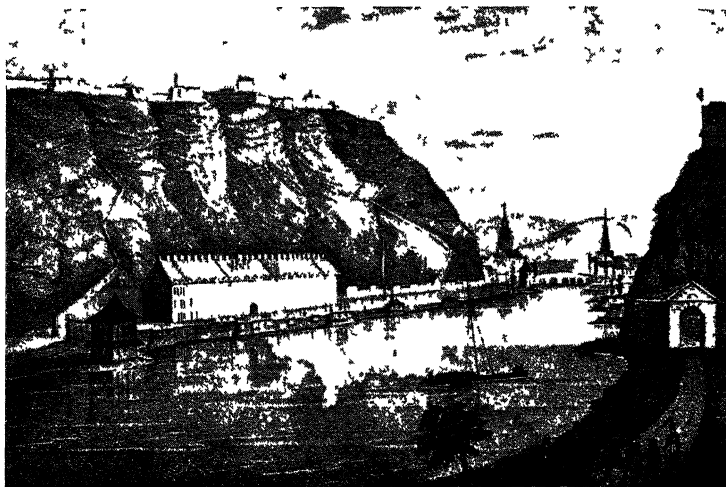
Entrance to the Fort of Bitche, taken from the Fossé (Escape of the fugitives)

See page 141



View of Bitche (With prisoners as they returned from Metz)

See page 150



View of the Givet Barracks, with Fortress of Charlemont above, Great Givet on same side of Meuse. Little Givet and the Mont d'Or fortified on opposite side

*See page 189*

"Our new guardian was quite as obliging as the former, finding there was not a horse and cart in the village. he yoked his own, and walked with us. He said that if a prisoner once obtained the favourable opinion of a brigadier, and was passed on with a good recommendation, having a little money, the chance was much in his favour of being well treated the whole route, with the exception of the road from Verdun to Bitche; which had so often been traversed by bad subjects, that there was not a *gendarme* stationed on it that would give the least credence to an Englishman's word."

At Hagenau their "worthy guard" got the jailer to let the prisoners sit in his apartment, and brought a surgeon from the hospital to dress their wounds. He pronounced them fast approaching mortification, and said that with more exposure the use of their hands would have been lost. He also dressed Ellison's foot, now much inflamed.

"Our worthy brigadier, having supped with us, took his leave. We presented him with twelve francs and each of his men with six. The jailer made us as comfortable as he could, and we passed a tolerable night."

At Niederbrun, next day, they were placed in the very house the "deceitful tailor" had recommended; where, as it now appeared, the *gendarmes* lodged. Here they had good beds, and the guards lay on the floor. But what with aching wounds, and long absence from feather mattresses, none could sleep. So they arose and ordered supper, the guards and house people thinking them quite mad. Then they lay down on the floor and slept pretty well. The *gendarmes* had six francs each, and in the afternoon, they entered the fortress of Bitche.

While awaiting the coming of the commandant and brigadier who were both in the town, Ellison remarked carelessly to one of the guards who had charge of their valuables: "Now you have got us safe here you may as



well return my watch; it will be some company when we are shut up in the *cachot*’; and the good-natured fellow at once handed it out.”

They were all standing round the fire in the room whence they had escaped. “The commandant marched in, and with a stern look said, ‘I am astonished, gentlemen, that you have the assurance to enter again this room, where my kindness had previously suffered you to dwell, and whence, taking advantage of my lenity, you escaped, and broke your parole.’

“We replied, that we were sensible of his kindness, and equally so that he did not consider us under parole. ‘True,’ said he, ‘but after giving you permission to live above ground, I thought it some little tie upon your honour’;—Looking round, he saw me smile—‘your laughing,’ said he, ‘shall be of short duration; the ordinary punishment is one month in the *cachot*, but yours shall be six.’

“After ordering us down to the *petit souterrain*, he took leave of us by saying, ‘J’ai été jusqu’ici un agneau, mais pour l’avenir je serai un véritable tigre’.”

An English surgeon attended cases in a hospital room at the *dépôt* once a day. Bad cases were generally sent to the hospital in town. The prisoners had to wait till next day as the surgeon was dining when they arrived. The *souterrain* was damp and cold; one side covered with ice. Wounds became more painful, and Ellison’s foot was terribly swollen. Owing to some professional jealousy between the English and French surgeons, the sufferers were kept in the dungeon instead of being warm, comfortable and cared for in the town hospital. “Besides,” Ellison adds, “the facility it would have afforded us for another escape, which was our primary reason for making an application, that being always the principal object of our thoughts; for we had now realised by experience that

the oftener danger is faced, the less it becomes an object of fear."

He says that three of their companions were also unfortunate [Simpson, Alison, and Worth], but that four succeeded in reaching England.

"After three days our worthy commandant allowed us to go up into the hospital room. After a month he himself appeared one evening, and sitting down by the fire, asked how we were? and if we could walk ninety miles to Metz?"

"Ellison said, 'No, sir, it is impossible,' and displayed his foot, which he unbandaged. 'Well then,' the commandant answered, 'You must ride; my orders are peremptory, and to Metz you must go, to be examined touching the *gendarme* on guard when you escaped; and you must be ready by six in the morning.'

"Four of us who had escaped, and the two we had left in the room, were selected . . . my companions' hands were far from healed, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I could walk at all." In the morning, a cart was in readiness in the town; and, handcuffed two and two, all six, guilty and innocents alike, were put into it and delivered to the *gendarmes*.

They arrived on the fourth day, at the prison in Metz, which had a bad name among prisoners. "But money will work wonders" says Ellison, "and the governess<sup>1</sup> put us into one of the best apartments, a tolerably warm room, having a fireplace; she sold us as much wood as we wished, and, for a pretty good premium, allowed us beds. Thus we were comfortable, and being our own masters, we could regulate the heat; and by paying attention to our wounds, they were nearly healed during the seven days we remained there.

Buché was on guard when we escaped, but I did not

<sup>1</sup> The Englishmen thus translated the word *gouvernante*—a sort of matron.

know it . . . he was then in prison with us, but found means to desire us to say we left the fort an hour sooner than we did. He had been off his post and a veteran informed on him. The prisoners were conducted by a file of soldiers to have their depositions taken, and next day were conducted in the same manner to attend the court-martial. The President began with questioning Ellison; "Will you tell me (though I am certain you will not), did the *gendarme* on guard know you were going?"

"I told him I did not know what *gendarme* was on guard."

Buché was severely handled. His only excuse was the intense cold that caused him to warm himself for a few minutes in the guard-room. He cried bitterly, said he had been long in the service, and his wife and three children must starve if they broke him.

"Being found guilty, the President addressed him with so much gesticulation and vehemence, that I began to be alarmed for the man," says Ellison, "fearing that if he were not condemned to be shot, he would not escape a few years at the galleys. I therefore stood up, and assured the President that neither myself nor any of the party knew who was on guard, it being a matter that did not concern us, all our operations being carried on both out of the sight and hearing of the guard.

"But he quickly put an end to my speech, by telling me in pretty plain language that he did not believe me. 'You Englishmen,' said he, 'will say anything to screen a man who has rendered you a service'."

To the amazement of the Englishmen Buché only got a punishment of fifteen days' imprisonment. It was he who allowed Ashworth and Tuthill to enter the *souterrain*, and he was with them as their accuser when Ellison met the party on the road to Metz.

'My sentence,' he goes on, 'was incomparably more severe, though I had not been tried. *'Quant à vous, Monsieur'* said the President, '*. . . vous n'échapperez plus; je vous ferai renfermer à la clef pour toujours*'—[As for you, Sir, you shall never escape again; I shall give orders that henceforward you shall always be kept locked up]."

Next morning the prisoners were handcuffed and all six chained together and marched off. The sight was so common that few people turned to look at them. At first it was "an unpleasant mode of travelling," Ellison remarks, but "when we had more evenly paired ourselves and had been a little broken in, not so bad as we anticipated."

This was Ellison's worst journey, the guards "not very civil nor ourselves in a very good humour." They reached Sarrelouis "where the second-rate bad characters were sent, or such as Wirion did not like." Here Ellison was visited by a number of old acquaintances, "among the rest, my mate, who was looking considerably better than his master, clean, nicely dressed, and having a respectably John Bull appearance. From him I obtained a gimlet, which I secreted about my person, preparatory to a future attempt."

At Sarreque mines was "a dungeon horrible on all sides round." A pitcher of water, three loaves of black bread and some dirty chaff-like straw, made prisoners welcome the daylight, though it was cold and wet.

On reaching what was called "the half-way house," the brigadier changed "from a tiger to a lamb." He explained that many of his companions had been ruined by our countrymen, he dared not favour us, as he could not tell which were trustworthy.


"Finding his reasoning correct, we became good friends, and after making our insides equally wet with the out,

eating a ravenous breakfast, and laying in a good stock of brandy, we went through the remainder of the march with glee."

Three leagues from Bitche, drenched as they were, they had to sleep in a prison.

"Happily we found," Ellison says, "as oftentimes before, a good friend in the jailer's wife, a most compassionate, kind-hearted woman. As soon as it was dark she made her husband fetch us upstairs, where we found a good fire and the best she had to eat. We begged hard to be allowed to remain there all night, but that was too great a favour . . . however she gave us plenty of straw, lent us a couple of blankets, and took our clothes up to dry. Soon after I lay down I felt such a reviving glow upon my bed of straw as might have put a feather one to the blush. No one, who has not experienced the misery of lying among dirty straw, can conceive the luxury of lying in that which is fresh and clean; and it would perhaps be a difficult thing to make these believe who have been delicately brought up, that a good night's rest may be compatible with a bed of straw, aye, even in a dungeon.

"In the morning, after remunerating our hostess, we set out as usual, and at twelve o'clock, after an absence of seventeen days, entered Bitche in marching order, handcuffed and chained, as sound in mind and body as if we had been only on a journey of pleasure, and quite ready for a new expedition."



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE FINAL ESCAPE FROM BITCHE OF SEACOME ELLISON, PETER K—, AND MIDSHIPMAN GEORGE HALL DACRE FROM BITCHE

THE commandant ordered the whole party into the *cachot* that night; but Alison, with hands still in a sling, and Ellison with his lame foot, chose to go into hospital, calculating that all would be released together at the end of the month.

"They therefore," continues Ellison, "descended to their watery abode . . . the day following I went with the servant who took them their victuals, to ask how they liked their new abode, and to have a laugh at them. They were all in good spirits." Ellison was unable however to enter the *cachot*, for fear of wetting his lame foot in the ankle-deep water. He asked the brigadier, "a good-natured fellow void of cruelty," to intercede for his comrades. He promised to do what he could, though, as he pointed out, it was the prisoners' fault; none could be trusted, and Ellison, in particular, "was known to have money and suspected of being the ringleader."

Later in the day Ellison visited Madame Buché with a letter for the post. "I found her," he says, "in a highly communicative humour, highly pleased with the result of the trial at Metz, and with me for defending her husband. She told me that one of my letters had been opened; and if I wished them in future to go safely, I must get some other person to direct and deliver them. She also told me all she knew of the precautions taken in the fort, where and when the sentinels were posted, and if any change took place, promised to inform me, though I did

not give her the least hint that I meditated any future attempt.

"Some days previously, Lieutenant Stewart, R.N., after being wrecked on the coast, had arrived at Bitche, suspected, it was said, of being a spy. Immediately on his arrival, he took upon himself the internal regulation of the *dépôt*, and saw that every man received what was allowed him, both by the French and English governments. The naval officers had great influence in all the *dépôts*, much more so than those in the army, which was rather singular, the French being a military nation. . . . The worthy lieutenant at once espoused our cause, and set about it like a Briton; for in three days the commandant, who was always inclined to mercy, gave an order for our companions to be removed above ground; though he knew by experience, wet as the dungeon was, it was not so prejudicial to health as was reported. I have observed some of the seamen coming up, after a thirty days' confinement, looking much better than when they came down. This may appear paradoxical, but is nevertheless true. There must have been some counteracting influence, which more than neutralised the dampness of the dungeon, the descent to which numbered upwards of thirty steps, having little light, or circulation of air therein, and never free from water."

The same day, Ellison and Alison joined the others in a room twenty-five feet by ten, with a guard-bed running its whole length. It was in the same building as the *cachot*; a small, isolated prison in the *grosse tête*, strong as iron, stone, and wood could make it. Each end of the room was guarded by two doors, the wall was four feet thick, the window well barred. Here ten were locked up, including two escapers from Sarrelouis. They were allowed to go outside, and soon discovered a room in an upstairs storey where washerwomen dried linen and kept

a window open. This was unbarred. The roof where this window was placed projected two feet from the wall and had a tin spout running along its edge. Would this bear the men's weight without noise (supposing the window could be reached)? Then there was the pacing sentinel to be eluded, and the sleeping jailer in a room beneath their own. Lastly, all beyond this fort was unknown ground—they did not know the height of the walls, the nature, wet or dry, of the ditches, nor the number of sentinels, if any, posted outside. However, the work of rope-making began once more, the two strangers having been removed. Friends, allowed to come twice a day, smuggled in linen of all sorts and needles and twine. The jailer allowed them an occasional hour's walk in the passage. The rope was tested over a door; the part made out of blankets gave way, and had to be cut up into smaller shreds and made into padding within the linen. This process thickened the rope and might save their hands from injury.

"During all this time" Ellison goes on, "our friend Moyses was an inmate of one of the rooms (he is now a resident at Tooting), and was hunting about for the sinews of war. I had money at Verdun, but there was no means of getting it remitted. K—— and I had only four double *louis* between us. We had agreed, if we should accomplish our plan, to make three parties, of two each. One party was well known to have plenty of cash; but they neither offered to lend, nor would they change our larger pieces for small. They were anxious to make the attempt immediately, but I, having the master-instrument, the gimlet, obliged them to wait my pleasure. The Lieutenant [Stewart] offered his assistance, but, like ourselves, had then no money by him.

"At length, after much exertion, Moyses mustered fifteen *louis*, which after paying my debts left K—— and



myself twenty-one to start with. Our plan, when ripe, was nearly frustrated by a trivial and unlooked-for event. The old woman from whom Dacre had hired his bed, to our great amazement, came to change his dirty sheets, which at that time were coiled snugly away under the beds in the shape of a rope. He, with admirable presence of mind, pretended to be tipsy, snatched the clean sheets out of her hands, and throwing them down, said 'I am paying you for another pair in the *souterrain*, and I shall keep both pairs, and you may come and change them next week.' Then throwing his arms round the old woman's neck, he handled her so roughly, that she cried out and was glad to make her escape.

"The clean sheets soon shared the fate of the dirty ones, and made a great addition to our rope, making it one hundred and forty feet long, which we judged amply sufficient. We took the precaution of covering the upper end of the rope with strips of an old brown coat, because our previous escape had been discovered by the whiteness of it, which had caught the sergeant's eye; and profiting by past experience, sewed the whole closely, instead of marling it.

"I had told Moyses that I had sent to Verdun for a snuff-box for the brigadier, which I requested him, when it came, to present in my name. I had also given him an order to receive what money I had lying there, and, with what might be left after paying himself, to treat all friends with a good dinner on receipt of the letter announcing our arrival in Austria. But, by mere inadvertency, I quite forgot to pay him for the sheets, which I have often regretted.

"The 12th of February being a squally, windy, dark day, suitable for our purpose, found us ready to take advantage of it. At breakfast time we asked Barnes, then in our service, to bring us as many beefsteaks and as much

bread as would pass unnoticed. This, with about three quarts of brandy . . . already secured in bladders, was to be all our store. At noon we looked an adieu at our visiting friends, being so closely watched by our guardians that we neither dare speak it, nor shake hands; sorry that we had not a more fit opportunity to thank them for the risk they had run to serve us."

All was ready by the afternoon. Lots were cast to arrange for the first happy man who was to lead, and for those to follow him. A prisoner underneath their room was hailed and asked to take no notice of noise, as they intended to be off that night. About six, the jailer looked in to see all safe. It was a Saturday and they told him it was their custom to make merry then. For his trouble and civility, they offered him six francs "which he took good-humouredly and bade us good-night."

With one mattress stuck against the window, and the others piled on the floor, operations began with the prisoners breaking the ceiling by means of an old poker found on the premises. The dust was smothering. Instead of laths, they encountered oak battens running from solid beam to beam. When the battens were cut, the operators stood on a small table placed on the mattresses, and attacked an oak floor, three inches thick. One knot twisted the gimlet. At about ten the jailer unlocked the outer door, and all were petrified. But he was only going to bed. When the hard work was nearly done, the saw broke. For a moment all was despair and gloom, and they had a vision of endless captivity. "On a sudden, A—d—n sprung upon his feet. 'Where are the pieces?' he cried; 'I am not going to give it up in this way.' With a knife, a piece of wood and some twine, he contrived a handle for the larger piece of the saw, and it answered the purpose. . . . Hope succeeded despair and gave us fresh

spirit. At three in the morning, after nine hours of toilsome labour, the last stroke was given, and the way made clear.

"The most affecting part of the concern had now arrived; that was the bidding adieu to our two companions, Alison, and Thomas Simpson, late gunner of the *Hussar*, who had shared the dangers of our last expedition, and whose hands had suffered most, being still unhealed. It was painful to us; what must it have been to them? The parting scene concluded, we scrambled through the hole, following up the enterprise which prudence seemed to forbid, and which experience could not flatter with success. From information subsequently received, we knew that when the commandant entered the room the next morning upon seeing the hole in the ceiling, he lifted up his hands and exclaimed, 'The d—— himself could not prevent the escape of Englishmen.'

"It was a dark, wild morning, blowing hard and squally; still, by a break in the clouds we could see the sentry snug in his box, separated from the place of our intended descent by the width of the building. No time was to be lost. The first that went down carried the rope, with two pieces of iron to stick in the walls, by which to fasten it, and although he was the heaviest among us, the spout stood firm, not making the least noise. All followed in quick succession, according to lot. It was arranged, that when the last had landed, one of the unfortunates should, to prevent speedy discovery, cast off the end of the rope, and that the last down should throw it over the wall. Thus, in the course of a few minutes, we found ourselves landed at the bottom of the second rampart, which we supposed seventy to eighty feet high; the first was forty to fifty-five. . . . But . . . alas! . . . we had only proceeded forty or fifty yards, when to our great amazement we came to another rampart, for which we were entirely unprepared;

not having any suspicion of it, we had left the first piece of rope behind.

"Here W[orth] appeared to have his eyes suddenly opened; he, who had previously forgotten that there were three ramparts, now burst into tears—as if he had foreseen what was going to befall him—and said, This is the very place where Wheelan broke his thigh!' (This was the name of the person with whom he had once before escaped, and who met with the accident.)"

Mr. Joshua Done, whose adventures will be told later, heard at Bitche that "Midshipman Worth, son of Admiral Worth, jumped off the ramparts, during a deep snow, and although the height was eighty feet, he sustained but little injury from his leap."

"Still," Ellison goes on, "he could give no account of the height of it. The rest were cool and collected, yet, strange as it may appear, it did not enter into one of our heads to try and break the rope—perhaps it was fortunate; the noise might have alarmed the sentinels; but we lifted the lightest one [man], to cut it [the rope] as high up as he could, whereby we obtained about nine feet, which to have fastened to the wall would have taken up the greater part. Still . . . we were determined to proceed, *coûte que coûte*, and risk taking a leap in the dark; judging from the height we had descended, it could not be very high.

"Upon consultation it was resolved that the two last should hold the rope for the others; and, provided they reached the bottom in safety, they should catch the former. After three had been safely landed, K—— begged of me, I being next in turn, to hold the rope for him; pleading his general bad fortune. I did not hesitate, being assured that he would break my fall, though by doing so, he should cripple himself. After he was down, I was in the act of dropping, and saying, 'Here goes, W——,' when the latter said, 'Do not be a fool, Ellison; I have a good handkerchief

in my pocket!’ and recollecting that I had two I sprang up again, tied the three together, and to the rope; then sticking my knife in the wall, and fastening one end to it, I reached the bottom safely, dropping only ten or twelve feet.

“Not so poor W——: he fell! a thrilling sound caught our ears, like the bursting of a soft rope, proclaiming a fractured limb—it was his leg, broken at the calf!

“He begged that we would carry him up to the fort gate, little thinking, poor fellow! in his pain, that complying with his request would place us again in jeopardy. We were then in the situation of soldiers on the field of battle, who have not a moment to mourn their fallen companions, but must push on or be vanquished. We could do no more than place him in an easy position. He put out his hand and said, ‘Adieu!’

“How it happened we had not time to ask. K—— asserted that the rope did not break, for he took particular notice that it did not fall with him [Worth]. On looking round I was surprised to find two of the party gone, but much more so when K—— informed me that they endeavoured to persuade him and Dacre to go also, saying they were safe, and why should they risk waiting for the other two?” Here is an account of Worth’s further story.

“At the latter end of the year 1808, or early in 1809, a midshipman, the son of the late Admiral Worth, with five more Englishmen, attempted to make his escape from the Fort of Bitche, in France, by means of a rope made from their sheets. The height of that part of the fort whence they descended, is near 96 feet perpendicular. Five succeeded, but the sheet unfortunately broke, and precipitated this brave lad near 30 feet by which he broke his thigh. Such was his courage, although in excruciating pain, that he remained at the foot of the fort from seven o’clock in the evening till eight the next morning. While

he lay in torture, the night patrol passed close to him; in the morning they found him still lying in the ditch, and asked him why he had not called for assistance? His answer was 'What, and betray my comrades? No—thank God! they have a night's start of you!' He recovered, and immediately on his recovery, according to the humanity of the French was put into a dungeon for several weeks."<sup>1</sup>

In a list of prisoners of war at Verdun in 1811 the names of midshipmen Potts, Worth and Moisey [Moyses] are mentioned, so it is to be hoped that they were permitted to leave Bitch.<sup>2</sup>

Ellison goes on, "Dacre having now lost his companion, K—— and I could not in pity leave him by himself, therefore told him he should share our fate, be it what it might. He acted a most disinterested part, and it was some time before he would accept our proposal. He said that although his companion had been unfortunate, and that he had to march by himself, it was the fortune of war, and no reason why he should intrude on us; that two was a safer number than three; that he had very little money, and that instead of being any help, he would be an incumbrance. We would hear of no refusal, and fortunately for all three, he acceded to our proposal."

They then ran along the ditch and up the steps to the glacis, where they took to the mountains, following a narrow path. At daybreak, lodged in a small wood, they heard the signal gun, and thought themselves about five miles from the fort.

At night they came to a village; but as Dacre twice fell while they tried to go round it, they decided to walk down the village road, in heavy rain, knee-deep in mud. A cur barked, and a man blew a horn, but they ran till they found themselves in a thick wood.

<sup>1</sup> *Naval Chronicle*, 1809, No. 22, p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1811, No. 26, p. 31.

At dusk they entered a lonely house and asked for wine. "The owner answered civilly: "But," says he, "You are from Bitche—I heard the gun yesterday morning." And turning to Dacre: "I know your face well," and mentioned the house where he had seen him. We did not deny it, and he cheered us up by saying: "Do not be afraid, I will not betray you; follow me upstairs, lest any of the forest guards should come in."

He was so "frank and open" that they entirely trusted him and partook of his food. "Presently we were joined by the butcher, who . . . belonged to the village we had entered the night before, but as everyone was in bed, and the night bad and dark, no one felt inclined to chase us." After a hearty meal, the landlord's servant was proposed as a guide and cheerfully consented to go for six crowns. "As soon as he was ready, after having obtained a good stock of provisions, we bade the company good-night, gave the master a *louis* and parted, mutually pleased with each other."

They had not gone far when Dacre, having drunk cider, was seized with violent spasms, which lasted four hours, during which time he had to keep lying down at intervals. They hastened the pace when he began to mend, and with daylight the guide led them into a thick fir-wood—a capital place to lodge in all day, after the goats with bells round their necks had been scared away.

In the evening they ascended a steep and dangerous road, amidst a dreadful thunderstorm. They were now among the Vosges Mountains, three or four leagues from the Rhine. "It was broad daylight before we reached a wood, upon the side of a high mountain, all but perpendicular . . . we could find no cover, the brushwood had all been cut down, and trees far apart. We had therefore to scramble to the top . . . a gigantic effort.

"While searching for a safe retreat, K—— was taken ex-

ceedingly ill; a burning fever seized him in a moment. 'I feel,' said he, 'as if I was all on fire.' The exertion of ascending the mountain was more than his constitution could bear. Poor fellow! his form was not of the right sort to endure more than the common hardships of life; it wanted compactness; he had too much of his own weight to carry. Still he was well made, good-looking, and of a robust appearance; but he stood nearly six feet high. I have often seen him take a common chair between his teeth and throw it over his head, but this was when he had plenty to eat and little to do. [This accounts for K——'s attempting to carry a ham in his teeth when he descended the rope.] It is the strong, sturdy man, who carries his bone and nerve in little compass, that is most generally endowed with the power to stand constant and extraordinary fatigue."

All they could do was to keep K—— company, at great risk. Two woodmen appeared, and the guide evidently told them, in dialect, who the travellers were. The woodcutters said the place was cold and bad and offered to make a fire. There were, they said, no forest guards about and no *gendarmes*.

The fugitives were then persuaded, and allowed themselves to be led beneath a high overhanging cliff. Some money was given to the woodmen, who went and purchased hot soup for K——, and also a jug of wine (tolerably good) and some bread, of which Ellison and Dacre made a hearty meal.

"These men shewed us much sympathy, and were pleased to render us any service, asserting that we had nothing to fear . . . and persisted in making a fire which we found comfortable and cheering." One of them, as he was going to see a relative three leagues off, offered to see them "out of the mountains." "K——, through the kindness of these poor fellows, being pretty well recovered,



we gladly accepted the proposal. . . . This man led us straight as the crow flies. We were more than an hour ascending the last mountain, and a jading ascent it was to all three; for Dacre and I had to assist K——. On reaching the bottom on the other side, we were in the valley through which runs the Rhine.”

At nine, the guides halted and went to procure food, which was much needed. They returned with a third man, who advised them to wait in the village till midnight, before risking the passage through a much larger one. They had three hours sleep in a hayloft, and the same man woke them and offered to take them through the said village [unnamed] for six francs, which was cheerfully given. They entered it at one o'clock.

“We crept silently and softly along, not daring to utter a word, until we saw a light which we knew to be the guardhouse. Here we hesitated—we stopped; seeing our danger, we could not help fearing the consequences of braving it. ‘There is no other way,’ whispered the guide, and we pushed on, feeling as if the success of our enterprise depended upon it.

“This was one of the most anxious moments of our journey—the village being about half a mile long, intersected by two rivers connected by bridges, and being on the borders of the Rhine, we had a very poor prospect of arriving at the extremity unmolested. But to our great joy all were asleep—not even a dog was heard to move his tongue.”

They were then left in charge of the former guide and marched along rapidly till, nearing “the great river,” they took cover in a wood. It happened to be a swamp, so at daylight, amidst drenching rain, they cut down branches to make beds and sent the guide to look for a boatman.

“Having been so long accustomed to wet jackets, we

felt little inconvenience; my companions were immediately snoring in happy unison. But I, being a little more thoughtful, and perhaps not feeling so much fatigued, saw the imprudence in our dangerous situation of all going to sleep. Yet I felt quite as much inclined as they, being painfully sleepy, and although the rain was coming down as before, felt warm, and—if in such a plight I may use the expression—comfortable.”

The guide returned at mid-day with “a villainous-looking little fellow,” who looked anything but trustworthy; but he insisted on their first parting with their faithful guide, sorely against their will. When it was dark, the little man led them to his own house in a small village. No sooner did his wife see them than “she began roaring and crying out loud enough to alarm the neighbourhood, asking him if he was going to ruin her? if he had forgotten her brother now in Strasbourg goal for a similar thing? . . . we slipped a six-franc piece into her hand, which had the magical effect of drying up her tears on an instant, and making her our friend.

“ . . . She took us up to a cock-loft, desiring us neither to move nor speak lest we should be heard. In a little time she brought us a dish of boiled *calavances* [beans], and some stewed prunes which, with the addition of plenty of wine, made the best meal we had partaken of since our departure. After supper she made us up a bed of clean straw; on it we slept soundly, rose in good spirits quite refreshed, and prepared to meet what lay before us.”

The man was ready to go in search of a boat, but not before he had received twelve crowns. “I, being principal cash-holder, remonstrated against paying beforehand, but being in a minority, I consented, and he set off.”

Their guide returned in the afternoon with another man who demanded a similar sum, which they had to pay. He said “Come along,” and though it was

daylight, they had to follow, "but not with very pleasant feelings."

They passed across the country and saw a number of people and were much alarmed; but passed unnoticed, until, after dark, they entered the man's dwelling. His wife received them "in a most affable manner and gave us of her best."

At four a.m. after paying and thanking the wife the party were led by the man into a wood; "hearing a whistle, we sallied out, and saw a man paddling a machine made of five boards. He had been watching, unobserved, until the *douaniers* had unlocked it, and as soon as their backs were turned, brought it away."

After paying four more crowns, this time without hesitation, "we were soon in the middle of the river, and behind an island, which hid us from the view of our old enemies, and shortly afterwards leaped ashore in Baden, about five leagues below Strasbourg—being the seventh day after leaving Bitche, though the direct distance was only twelve leagues."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ELLISON'S FINAL ESCAPE

AFTER refreshing themselves at a cottage to which the boatman led them, the fugitives started a march which, considering paths and by-ways, was one of about four hundred miles through an enemy country. They had seven *louis* among the three of them.

They had unluckily forgotten all the names of the places between the Rhine and Ulm. In a wine-house in the

Black Forest they saw a notice hanging up, which proved to be an order by Napoleon that all vagrants and people without passports must be taken up. This was a guard-house, and they hastily retreated after drinking their wine. In another village, in the evening, a cottage door was opened by a Frenchman who civilly directed them to a house for the night. He saw them out of the village next morning, when they confided in him and asked for advice.

"You have little to fear in Baden," he said, "but keep off the main roads in Wurttemberg, whatever you do. The *Landwehr*, like the French *gendarmarie*, stop all travellers without a passport."

Another Frenchman went six miles with them and left them at the house of a friend of his, a "jocose, worthy fellow." Here they found means to look at a map and take down the names of the villages on their route; taking care to keep a good way from the great military road; for they knew themselves to be only a few days' march in advance of the army that was going to attack Austria; and they kept to byways.

Two nights afterwards, they were fortunate in putting up at the house of a "fine open-hearted Frenchman. We soon ventured to trust him with our secret. He told us we had done right in passing as his countrymen, for the inhabitants would be civil to us through fear. Whether he was right or wrong, I cannot tell; but we generally met with civility, and were never asked what we were, or where we came from. Here we had our shirts washed and dried ready for the morning, which was our first and last shift on the journey."

Now snow fell, which retarded progress. They came in sight of Eingen [Hechingen or Engen?], hired a guide to see them round it, and "crossed the Danube over an old wooden bridge not more than twenty-five yards long."

They reached the river Iller<sup>1</sup> next day and drew near Biberach. They approached the gates of the town in great anxiety, but found, to their relief, a narrow road leading round the ramparts. But, turning a corner, they were alarmed to see a guardhouse; a man came out and stood in the middle of the road.

"This," we said to each other, "is our last day's march; this fellow is sure to stop us, but let us show a good face and go boldly on." They did so, and he looked at them, but did not speak; and, resisting the impulse to run, they walked past, "in a careless, fear-nothing manner." Passing later over a bridge, they found themselves on the left bank of the Iller; they looked at a finger-post pointing to Augsburg and Memmingen, and followed the latter way at a venture.

"While dinner (at the first most inviting house) was preparing, I was endeavouring to put on a new pair of shoes which I had carried in my pocket, my old ones being worn out. Whether my feet were swelled, or whether the shoes were originally too little I could not tell; all I knew was, that I could not get my feet into them; but necessity being the mother of invention, it struck me that by putting the shoes in water the leather would yield to my feet, and afterwards make a close fit. This I immediately did, and let them soak until I had dined. The plan succeeded admirably, and when a fair day came and they grew stiff, I gave them a fresh soaking.

"Poor K——'s stamina was now showing evident signs of being unable to carry him through. His body, which a few weeks ago was erect, good-looking and robust, was now dwindled to the appearance of a very scarecrow—mere skin and bone; his coat hanging loose about him: . . . His hat, through constant rain, hanging about his

<sup>1</sup> So Ellison; but the geography points to the river Riss, not the Iller. He does not give sufficient detail for clearing up this section of the route.

ears; his frame bent double, leaning upon a staff, utterly changed his former appearance.

"His sufferings were extreme, his complaints and moans piteous—so much so, that to be out of hearing of the distressing sounds, Dacre and I generally kept a good way before him. Often, at the edge of dark, when we drew near a village, his haggard eyes would brighten up, and he would say, 'Now we have made an excellent day's march, we must take up our lodging here.' And as often were we under the painful necessity of saying, 'No, we must go on another stage.' Then would his eyes resume their former languor, and we, as usual, kept on before him. Happily, his sleep and appetite never forsook him; he always rallied in a morning, otherwise we must have left him to his fate, for our funds would not allow of any resting days."

In a small "pothouse" which they entered, they were taken for Frenchmen, Ellison lay down on a form near the stove and slept a few minutes, but woke up and was sick and good for nothing, overcome by the heat. It was a warning, after a long march, never to lie down. "I found pacing about the room a better antidote for weariness than either sitting or lying."

Next morning, when they sought to change a *louis*, a German sitting by unbuckled his belt and showed an "abundance of gold and silver and made our poverty covet a similar girdle." He offered to guide them to Memmingen. The weather was severe, snow and bitter east wind, and the prospect bleak and dreary. The German (whose face bled with the cold) never passed a public-house; and being generous, "felt chagrined" because they were more moderate than he and would not let him be paymaster. "Indeed we stood in need of something, for we had to be our own pioneers . . . the snow was deep, sometimes knee-deep, and we

were puzzled to make a passage occasionally through the drift."

Their companion never asked questions and was so "affable and friendly we felt we could trust him safely, especially as he trusted himself and his valuable belt with three such suspicious, vagrant-looking characters, of whom he knew nothing." He would not at first believe that they were Englishmen till a French master of a post-house convinced him. They were warned not to enter Memmingen. They had now to pass across the Iller again, and the frontier of Wurttemberg. Their German friend had made light of this, but hesitated when they reached the long covered bridge. "Then, brandishing his stick, he said, 'Come along; they shall not take you without a struggle.'

"I went first," Ellison says, "and had no sooner turned off the bridge (like a long tunnel) than, to my utter amazement, I was close upon a barrier. Seeing no one, I pushed on, gladly would I have run, but durst not, neither did I venture to look behind me for some minutes, when I saw them all in safety, the German bringing up the rear. We supposed the extreme cold had favoured us, by keeping round the fire those that ought to have prevented us passing."

Another league brought them near the gates of Memmingen. Here came the "most painful sensation of the day," the parting with their friend. He begged them to enter the town and let him make all arrangements for their safety. They feared to seem ungrateful, but feared more "being surrounded by walls and numbers of people," and finally shook his hand and tore themselves away. After a cross-country walk of a few miles they entered a small public-house before dark, and found "a cheerful, laughing hostess, who soon made them forget the fatigues of the day." They told her their secret, as she invited

them back again. "We hoped circumstances would not cause her to think us impolite, when we assured her, if we did call again, it would be by force, not through choice."

They saw Landsberg, a fortified town, and turned off the road, walking over snowy fields and across a long wooden bridge. Although workmen were repairing this, none spoke to the vagrants. But now they were troubled by "the increasing debility of poor K——" (who was only kept on his legs by resolution and stimulants).

They approached Munich and found they must go through the suburbs. In an inn they sat by a decent-looking man, his wife and child, out for a Sunday afternoon. They talked and shared their meal with these people. Finally the man offered to take them to Munich, through the suburbs, saying there would be no risk. The woman and child walked slowly, and were left behind as they neared the gates. The man acted as guide, and sentinel after sentinel was passed; snow was falling, and it was dusk and no police were to be seen. After running the gauntlet for two miles and crossing three long bridges, they paid and thanked their kind guide. "We pushed on, and night closed upon us in the midst of a plain, covered with snow, and not a house in sight."

Here K——'s legs almost failed him, and for six weary miles his companions had to support him on either side; till, seeing a light, they entered comfortable lodgings in a village. "After having rubbed his legs and feet well with soft soap and brandy, and giving him something warm, we put him to bed, where he soon fell asleep. Dacre and I had been in the habit of rubbing our own almost every night, which never swelled to inconvenience us; whether or not that prevented them, I cannot tell. Poor K—— was always too much fatigued to do anything more than eat his supper.

"Next day he was very stiff, and walked worse than



ever, in fact his system was almost worn out. It was painful to force him along, but what could be done? Two or three days more would see us in safety, or in a Bavarian prison; our liberty was at stake, and our funds fast decreasing. We led and coaxed him along until 2 p.m., and as it had rained incessantly all day, we took up our quarters and let him rest till next morning, when he was a little recruited. All was still right about him, he had no ailment beyond sheer, downright fatigue."

After the usual morning's allowance of a glass of brandy and a piece of bread, they set out next day, K—— walking much better than on the previous one. At ten they could see Wasserburg, the last fortified town in the Bavarian dominions, but it was troublesome to make their way round it. Within three miles of the town the road was like a swamp, with snow, water and mud, ankle-deep, sometimes knee-deep. "Twice was K—— bog-foundered, and twice we had to pull him out, and ill as he was we could scarcely help smiling to see the way he foundered.

"‘This,’ said he, ‘will most certainly be my last day’s journey; for I am sure I shall have my legs broken before I get across this place.’ He was an unfortunate fellow; if there was a hole, he was sure to get into it. After hours of toil, a high hill had to be ascended with great pain by our unfortunate companion." At the top was a large deserted convent, and they descended a very high flight of steps, regaining the plain near the river Inn. In a little while they came to three poor miserable-looking men, loading a boat with faggots. "They put us across in a minute for the small sum of three farthings each, and as we could be generous at trifling expense, we doubled it, receiving their good wishes and thanks."

K—— was now nearly exhausted, and all were hungry and weary and entered the first house for food and rest. Here K—— begged to stay and "spoke most piteously."

But circumstances were inexorable. So, trying to cheer K—— with a promise of probable safety in twenty-four hours, they started for the next post-house, seven miles away. "He did try, but soon dropped, saying: 'now you may either stay by me, or leave me, for I am unable to move another step'." Just then a sledge came up and the driver was asked "to give an unfortunate worn-out fellow a drive. 'I will give you all one,' he replied." So K—— was lifted upon it and the others sat beside him and the post-house was reached by eight o'clock.

The landlord received them civilly and asked no questions. He pitied K—— and did what he could for him and gave him a bed. After which Ellison and Dacre talked to him about eluding the police at the frontier. That, it appeared, was a desperate business. Finding him "communicative and obliging, and having in numerous instances experienced that we gained friends whenever we made ourselves known," they thought it safer to tell the landlord who they were, and ask his advice. He advised them to put a bold face on the matter, and take one of the inn vehicles; they might be allowed to pass. So they went to bed and rose early: "We gave ourselves an extra polish, and stepped into the chaise or sledge and drove off with hearts less at ease than our superior mode of travelling indicated."

They soon entered a small town; the chaise stopped at the Post Office, where passports were demanded. They had none, and were told to alight and taken into a room, where a long dialogue ensued. They pretended to be Americans coming from Barcelona; declared they had had passports in France, but had thrown them into the Rhine, as useless after that point. They produced a letter, fabricated before leaving Bitche, dated from New York and directed to Barcelona, requesting them to return home. The gentlemen did not understand English; they

were "astonished, lost in amazement," but finally said that the travellers would not be detained, but must pay 27s. and added that the Austrians would not let them pass their barrier.

"We thanked them, paid the money, made one of our best bows and retired elated with joy so contrary to expectation that we could hardly contain ourselves.

"It was well for us that not a muscle of our faces nor a limb of our bodies showed emotion or agitation, neither did our tongues once falter; also that K—— was so far recovered as to speak with energy. Their reason for not detaining us must remain a mystery. The tale was improbable . . . our weather-beaten countenances, our hats, our linen, our clothes, our shoes—in fact our *tout ensemble* was that of vagrants—and yet that they should have let us pass, is one of those things which sometimes happen that cannot be accounted for; and which give encouragement in desperate cases to persevere against hope.

"Afterwards we were driven past the Bavarian Arms, painted on a board on the right hand side of the road, and a few yards further, on the left, the Austrian Arms painted in like manner. We saw no natural boundary. On arriving at the guardhouse we jumped out of the carriage and declared ourselves Englishmen, come to seek the protection of the Austrian government, which we knew to be on friendly terms with our own, and were received politely by the officer, who sent us to Traunstein, a small wooden town. Here we were examined, and paid off the postilion.

"At eight p.m., after a toilsome and harassing march of twenty-two days, through byways and hedges, beset by enemies on every side, exposed to the inclemency of a severe winter, and all the painful consequences attendant on light purses, our guards delivered us up at the police-office at Saltzburg [Salzburg], where we were soon ushered

into the presence of the Director, a worthy, affable old gentleman. After asking a number of questions, he sent us with an officer to an inn where we were told to keep quiet and not go out nor tell anyone who we were till next morning.

“On entering the inn, to our great astonishment, we saw our two fellow-prisoners who had deserted us at Bitche. They had obtained passports at Wurtzburg, and travelled post most of the way, yet had only arrived the night before.”

Next day, the Director sent for Ellison and his friends; and after spending their last sixpence on the bill for lodgings and breakfast, they went to the office.

The Director did not think it advisable to give them passports as Englishmen for two reasons. First, because everything was not arranged between Austria and Great Britain; and second, because the French were daily expected to pay them another visit. If it should be discovered that he had been aiding Englishmen to escape, it might be attended with unpleasant consequences; but he would give them passports as Americans, which should be ready in the afternoon.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ELLISON IN ENGLAND

“DACRE and I went round some of the principal merchants in the place [Salzburg] to try if we could obtain money for a bill on England. This we found more difficult to accomplish than breaking out of prison. . . one clerk, to our great mortification, threw us a florin upon the

counter, which we—no little piqued at being taken for beggars—threw back again.

“I then endeavoured to sell my gold watch; with the chain, seal and key, all of gold. The watchmakers took out the works, which they valued at nothing, and weighing the cases, none of them offered more than four pounds. This, for the present, I determined not to take, trusting that something better might, in the course of the day, turn up.”

In the meantime K—— at the inn was conversing with an Austrian General of Engineers. K—— told “a moving tale”; how he and his companions had descended walls frightful to behold (as witness his hands) at the risk of a fall, or a shot from the sentinel’s muskets, how they had left one of their number in the ditch with a broken leg; that they had been in danger of irons, dungeons, or even of the galleys. . . . They were now, after all the miseries of the freezing, furtive journey, penniless in a strange, though friendly land. K—— gave the General a hint of “the respectability” of his own family—“no bad travelling passport,” adds Ellison. One of the party, K—— went on, had just gone out to sell a watch, upon which he set great value, “because it had been handed down in the family from generation to generation from the time of the Conquest or before, and they had no other way of raising the wind.”

The General was moved and sorry: “I venerate Englishmen,” said he, “and if to-day I can render them a service, it will afford me pleasure.” He added that his own funds were not abundant, his fortune had been spent on raising troops to defend his country, and he looked upon the future with anxiety. He then left the inn but returned after Dacre and Ellison had entered it (“luckily he expressed no desire to see the ancient relic, for there would have been a discrepancy between it and K——’s

talé"). The general then offered them sixty-five florins (about seven pounds sterling) apologising for the smallness of the sum.

The Englishmen refused his generous offer until he informed them how to repay it in England, or to some house in Trieste. At length he consented to give them the name of a person in that town and left them with good wishes for a safe arrival home.

"We allowed K—— to keep forty florins, and went with him to take a place in the diligence, which went next night to Trieste. We wrote to our friends at Bitche, under cover of a lady at Verdun, giving them, for their instruction, a particular account of all our proceedings. At the police office our passports were ready.

"The worthy Director, in handing them to us, asked the state of our pockets. Dacre and I replied that we had plenty of money for seven days, in which to reach Trieste. He said it was impossible to reach it on foot in the time, he had never known of an instance . . . even in ten days the march was reckoned harassing. He showed us the map . . . the stupendous mountains that we should have to cross; the difficulties and dangers of some of the passes; and the distance, 280 miles. . . .

"Seeing us determined, he offered us a few florins . . . which was respectfully declined, having no way of repaying his generosity. He shook his head and hoped we should find we had enough."

"At sunset Dacre and I bade adieu to K—— at the police office door. No longer impeded by his infirmities; and both being in good marching condition, with light hearts and buoyant, we commenced our journey, confident that we should complete it in the time."

Next day they walked along a narrow precipitous road, unrailed; "the lives of all who rode that way depended upon the skill of the driver and the steadiness of the

horses." The country was snow-covered, the cold intense. Sometimes they feared "to lose ears and noses." Although they now travelled openly and with passports, they found the country folk uncivil, and the houses dirty, and even "the females, an exception to their sex—unkind."

For the second night they stopped at a house where they saw a "convoy of waggons," and after supper with the waggoners they asked more than once for a bed. At last straw was spread in the room where they had supped, and the waggoners, "having littered down their horses, came now to be littered down themselves. . . ." This was the Englishmen's bed that night and, remonstrance being useless, they took possession of one corner and slept soundly.

"There was one advantage attending even this mode of lodging. Our bedfellows rose about four o'clock, which caused us to awake and be stirring at the same time; then, drinking a glass of brandy and taking a large slice of bread in our hands, which was our usual practice, we could walk three or four leagues comfortably before breakfast. Our diet was chiefly bread, milk, eggs and wine; meat we found very scarce, and by day never once waited to have a bit cooked—our united stoppages from morning to night never exceeded an hour and a half."

Villach was reached the third day, and passports were endorsed. Here a few florins were left for K——, as the others thought that "in his weakly condition he might be short, and that they themselves had made good progress." While waiting, they witnessed the savage way the deserters from the army were treated by the Austrians, with fetters and a chain, "compared to which the chains we were fettered with in France," says Ellison, "were silken bands."

"The bold majestic scenery by which we were surrounded excited our astonishment and admiration, mingled with dread. Its appearance in our forlorn state

was appalling. The lofty mountains we had to climb by steep paths; the going over the passes on the summits, running along the sides of ravines fearful to look down; all nature was clothed in white, save the noisy river that was dashing among the rocks at the bottom; the piercing cold, the steep descents, in short the whole we had to encounter, gave us convincing proof that our friend the Director at Salzburg had not exaggerated the dangerous, toilsome path before us."

On the evening of the fourth day they learned that they had not made half their distance. This was startling, as the money was half spent. In the morning, Dacre, who insisted on carrying the passport, had lost it. Ellison had accidentally found it in the straw, but tormented him before he produced it, with talk of returning to Bitche. This fifth day was the worst. They could only procure five eggs each and a little black bread, and walked fifty miles. At nightfall they were refused a lodging. . . . "This to our feet and stomachs was hard treatment, but patience and perseverance were the only remedy, though the bark of a dog would have been music in our ears."

After some miles, Ellison's shoe-heels "came down," and both men were quite speechless with fatigue. At length they found a village and entered an open door, finding a clean comfortable room with pictures hung round, and a respectable-looking man and woman sitting by the fire.

"This is too fine for us," they said to each other, "we shall have to move on."

The man, however, eyed them for a time and asked for passports.

"We said we had them and were Englishmen. 'Englishmen!' said he, 'why I had four of them in my house a few weeks ago. Do you know Dr. Porteous?'"

"We replied that we did and had escaped with them in a party of twelve and been retaken.



“‘Oh then,’ said he, ‘sit down, and we will do our best for you’.”

While they rubbed their legs he told them “he had been head waiter in the first inn at Laybach, that he knew Lord Nelson, Lady Hamilton, and a number of the English nobility. In a short time the good woman brought in some veal cutlets and pancakes to which we did justice.”

The two beds in a clean room proved to be not only damp, but wet, but the travellers were “moisture-proof” and rose refreshed. This day they reached Laybach [Laibach] through pleasant level country, clear of snow. When a “surly-looking fellow” read their passports he said:

“You cannot be Americans. They are all black and cannot speak German.”

“We laughed and complimented his sagacity, but hearing we were English, he took us before the Director of Police, a gentlemanly silver-headed old man. He understood, apologised and set us at liberty.”

The sixth night was spent in a hovel with drunken, noisy vagrants who kept them awake all night. They rose long before daylight, tired, and without the usual allowance of bread and brandy, before the long march to Trieste.

“This was the first time I had to complain of my feet, the soles of which burned like a coal, caused by the sorry state of my shoes. Had our shoes not failed, and the lodging been quiet, we should have been just as fresh as when we started, and well able to go the distance over again; our feet had never blistered, our bodies had not suffered in the least, neither had we lost much flesh.

“At eight we passed through a small town, and were not ashamed to stop at a standing where we saw drams and cakes to be sold. Each drank a good glass, and, taking some cakes in our hands, proceeded onward . . .

being assured we had only five of six more leagues to go. This welcome news, coming upon a full stomach, put us again in good walking trim; and we had need of some stimulant, for it was a most disagreeable bleak, cold day, the wind blowing hard from the north, sending one continual cloud of dust, as if to put the finishing touch to our appearance.

"At two, near a large town, we turned into a house to brush off some of the dust . . . we also shaved and washed—operations that had latterly been dispensed with. Still we were the same vagrant-looking characters as before. Our complexions were a dirty brown, the crowns of our hats irregularly dented,—the brims neither horizontal or perpendicular, but curiously bent. Our hair, which had grown long and thick, hung dangling down according to its own fancy; our shirts were any colour but white, not having been off our backs for seventeen days; our pantaloons, originally blue, had taken a good standing mud colour; our stockings were indescribable, the greater part of them having vanished long before; our shoes were tied to our feet, and our gaiters, matching them in colour, lay in negligent folds around our ankles. My coat was a little exception to the other part of our dress, still preserving some little indication of having seen better days—it was of the best French broadcloth, and did the manufacturer credit, having braved all my hardships since I left Verdun.

"At three o'clock we were amply rewarded for all our toil by the pleasure of once more beholding our native element, and the town of Trieste, about five miles beneath our feet. Thus, after a tedious march of thirty days, with only one day's halt during that period, we sat down for a little while to contemplate the beauty of the shipping lying in the road. But I did not feel all that pleasurable sensation that the end of our toil warranted. It had been

too long in anticipation, to call forth that ecstasy of delight which sudden and unexpected deliverance imparts; such as getting safely past the man at Biberach, and stepping again into the carriage on the Bavarian frontier . . . we had then been in safety eight days.

"After having admired the prospect for a few minutes, we proceeded 'down the hill to Trieste,' (a common saying when we were prisoners). The road was covered with wagons and carts, laden with colonial produce (the port having just been opened for its reception); most of the former being drawn, some with nineteen, some with twenty horses; from which circumstance, an idea may be formed of the steepness of the ascent.

"At five we entered the town, having completed the march from Saltzburg about one hour under the seven days we allowed ourselves for the undertaking. By our computation [we] had gone over at least two hundred and eighty miles of a road as mountainous, as jading to the human frame, and under as trying circumstances, as could well be imagined.

"Instead of bridling our appetites until we had seen the British Consul, we gave way to the cravings of hunger; and entering the first eating-house we came to, ordered the best dinner that the residue of our funds could command. Our last farthing being spent, we sallied out to seek him, resting assured of obtaining a fresh supply of cash."

But the Consul was away for the day and night. They applied to his lady, an Italian, for help and she told them to use her name and get lodged at one of the inns. They did go, and were refused admittance by all; and, Ellison says, it was no wonder, as they appeared so miserable.

Here was one more serious hardship. They rambled about till ten, and then, in a poor-looking public-house, Ellison pawned his watch for a bed, but was obliged to

order supper as well, though sleep was now much more needed. In the morning they met K—, “quite recovered and in good spirits, travelling by coach having suited his constitution much better than travelling on foot.”

“He told us he had seen the French Ambassador, General Andreossi, pass through Salzburg, having quitted the Court of Vienna, so that we had only just saved our distance. For, had the French Army arrived on the frontiers of Austria before us, we should, in all probability, have had to pay a third visit to Bitche. He also told us that he had received the money we left for him at Villach, which he found very seasonable.”

The Consul was at home again and received his countrymen kindly and promised to take their bills for as much money as would see them home comfortably. He had no power, at the moment, to act officially, matters not being fully arranged between the two governments, otherwise they would have been entitled to half a crown a day marching money, and a free passage home.

“Having redeemed my watch and deposited the money due to our good friend, the Austrian General, we went to look out for a vessel to carry us down the Mediterranean and were fortunate in finding an Austrian brig, all ready for Malta; not waiting a wind, but waiting until as fine a gale as could blow should moderate. We procured a passage, and then selected out of a shop of ready-made articles a suit of new clothing; and indeed we stood in need of it. . . . In three days the gale lulled sufficiently to tempt the Austrian sailors to take advantage of it, and we had the delight of finding ourselves once more afloat, all in good health, having been joined again by our two former companions. On the twentieth day we saw the island of Malta. . . . In a few hours we were on British ground, and finding a convoy ready to sail for England,

we hasted up to the Governor, to obtain a passage in a man-of-war.

"Sir Alexander Ball received us in a kind, gentlemanly manner, asking a number of questions; then turning to Dacre and Butterfield (both midshipmen), said, 'I shall provide for you, gentlemen, but as for the others, I am sorry it is not in my power to comply with their request'."

K—— and Ellison begged him to consider their fate if re-captured, but without apparent result. There being no choice but to risk a merchant ship, K—— and he hastened to apply to one of the masters.

". . . We soon succeeded, Mr. Fletcher, commanding the ship *Fletcher*, of Liverpool, consented at once to take us on board. The following morning but one, we accidentally met Dacre, who asked where we were going. We told him.

"'Why,' said he, 'I am just come from head-quarters, and saw lying on the table an order for you both to go on board the *Lucifer* . . . I have been appointed acting lieutenant to the *Nettuno*, and the other two are on board the *Sabrina*.'

"Rejoiced to hear that the worthy Governor had reconsidered our case, we hastened to receive the order and present ourselves on board H.M.S. *Lucifer*, where we met with a cordial reception. She was then getting under way with two brigs of war, and we were soon proudly gliding through the magnificent harbour of Malta, with about forty sail of merchantmen in our train.

"When the bustle of getting under way was over, we were introduced into the ward-room, where we presently found ourselves at home, receiving every mark of kindness from the officers, even to the use of their wardrobes. Captain Hall also showed us every attention, and invited us in turn to his table."

The journey was no more free from perils than that on

land. They met a succession of gales, and in the heaviest they lost the convoy; towed a "dismasted straggler" into Sardinia, and lost some days there.

K——'s fingers were healing, but those on the right hand were so much contracted, that he could never afterwards straighten them. The surgeon of the *Lucifer* persuaded K—— to let him make three incisions across the fingers and bandage the hand on a splint; but though K—— suffered much pain from the operation, the fingers continued so tender that he had difficulty in getting up the ship's side.

"One evening, by a most strange coincidence, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, the account he had given of his family connection was about being put to the test by a sail appearing to windward. She soon made her signal, when the Captain called K—— to him, and said, 'Yonder is your relative,<sup>1</sup> M——'s ship, would you like me to inform him you are here?'

"He replied in the affirmative; and in a very short time her boat was on board with an invitation for K—— to visit the *Alceste* frigate, where he was received in a friendly manner, and presented with half a dozen changes of linen and twenty guineas."

The *Lucifer* passed through the convoy on the twenty-fifth day after leaving Malta, and had hardly anchored in the Bay of Gibraltar, when the gale increased to a hurricane. Here they were wind-bound sixteen days. After touching at Cadiz, the *Lucifer* had a passage of seventeen days and arrived at Plymouth.

Here, five days quarantine "appeared to us as long as those in the wood near Verdun, but like all other disagreeables, it vanished away, and we were liberated. On 25th May 1809, after an absence of six years and a

<sup>1</sup> Captain Murray Maxwell is mentioned as commanding the *Alceste*, frigate, in *Naval Chronicle*, No. 19, 1808, pp. 343-44, and in later years.

quarter, five and a quarter of which I had passed in confinement; and having been three months and eighteen days traversing upwards of four thousand miles to obtain my liberty, I had the happiness of being put ashore on my native land."

"Having thanked the captain and officers for their great kindness, paid my share of the mess, and taken leave of K——, whom I left with a relation he met with in Plymouth, I set off for London. At the entrance of the town I mounted upon the outside of the coach, thinking I might perhaps see the face of some old acquaintance. To my great joy, passing through one of the streets, I espied Cecil, and leaping off the coach, I gave him a slap on the shoulder which almost brought him to the ground. He turned, and between the nature of the salute, the surprise at the unexpected meeting, and the weakness of his frame (being just recovered from a dangerous illness), he had scarcely strength to shake me by the hand. We spent the evening talking over old times, the dangers we had encountered, and the hairbreadth escapes we had had since parting. The day after their meeting, Ellison and Cecil separated, 'as time hath shown, for ever.'

"On my arrival home," the narrative continues, "I found my friends prepared in some measure for my reception. They had heard in a circuitous way the preceding evening of my being safe in Germany. Barklimore had passed through Liverpool on his way to Dublin a few weeks previously, and reported how he left me at Bitche; the day following he called on his return, not having heard of me since we parted. 'On being introduced into the room where I was sitting, he lifted up his hands and eyes, and expressed his surprise in a French exclamation which brought a smile from all present.

"On the 7th of June I had the pleasure of hearing from my friend Boys, who arrived at Dover on the 10th of the

previous month, and had since been made lieutenant, and was already afloat. He had escaped from Valenciennes on the 16th of November, and in six days reached the coast, after which time he was wandering from place to place, or lying concealed, until the 8th of May; subject to the inclemency of a severe winter, and to all the painful vicissitudes attending the evasion of a most vigilant *gendarmerie* and coast-guard.

“After being at home many months, I received a letter from K——, of which the following is an extract:—

‘I am happy to find that you bear your disappointment [failing to find employment] with resignation. We have both had a lesson in philosophy, and of late had sufficient excuse for exercising it. For my own part, since I left you at Plymouth, I have experienced nothing but a continued series of mortifications and disappointments. And I can assure you that the anxieties, dangers and hardships attending our escape from France were as nothing compared to what I have felt the little time I have been in England. On my arrival in London I found myself, from long absence, a complete stranger, and the reception I met with from my great friends (as you were in the habit of calling them) was the very reverse from what I expected. I soon found that I had nothing to hope for from that quarter, and that I stood alone, the very emblem of my country, poor, but proud. I made several unsuccessful attempts to get myself settled, and at length, with no assistance but the *brass*, which is the natural portion of all Scotsmen, I procured a free marinership before any of my relations knew that I had applied for it. A former acquaintance, who is now a Captain in the East India Company’s service, has offered me a passage out, and I am promised letters of the strongest recommendation from some of the first houses in London to the first in Calcutta; so that after all, I set out with tolerable prospects. The escape of my friend General Baird gave me great satisfaction and is likely to prove of the greatest utility to me. He . . . has offered in the most generous



manner to assist me to the extent of his ability [with outfit for India, etc.]. I am sorry it will not be in my power to return to London your way; nothing would have given me greater pleasure; but I have promised to accompany Baird by the way of Edinburgh. We shall meet Barklimore in London; do try, my dear fellow, to make one of the party; it will be the only chance we shall have of meeting until I return a *Nabob*.'

"I had this chance; being called to London, I passed a few days with him and his friend Baird, when, the ship being ready for which I was waiting, I sailed for Rio Janeiro and Monte Video, and we saw each other no more.

"In the course of a few years he was, as I have been informed, returning a nabob. But as is generally the case in the debilitating climate of India, in attaining the pinnacle of his desire, he undermined his constitution. And near to that part of the ocean where he had been made a prisoner by his fellow-man, he was overtaken by the arch-enemy, and consigned to the prison from which there is no escape.

"Unlike poor K——, I found no change in my friends; but after months had rolled over my head, and I could obtain no employment, then, like him, I felt that being compelled to lead an inactive life, the body being free, was more irksome than chains and imprisonment.

"At length to my great joy, through the help of a good friend, I obtained what I had so long sought for, employment in South America, where I succeeded, and returned in safety. Dacre,<sup>1</sup> I believe, is dead, and I only, though no more worthy than my companions, am still left in the land of the living."

Here Ellison's *Narrative* ends, and he tells us little about his life as a man of business, for six or seven years in South

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Dacre (Midshipman passed for Lt.) in July 1809.

America and afterwards in Liverpool. But the appendices to Ellison's *Narrative* contain interesting glimpses of the older man, walking about the docks, talking to the seamen, discussing and comparing their lives in the Navy and Merchant services, their views on corporal punishment, and containing his only mention of the slave trade. He also is familiar with slum dwellers and with prisons. He suggests that unruly boys should be placed in a prison ship to be trained and disciplined; he advocates the abolition of slums before the problems of a prison population can be dealt with. He agrees with Howard and other reformers that prisons should be well-built, well-ventilated, well-placed, and kept clean, but advocates stringent discipline. Some of these reforms are being carried out a hundred years after his time.

In his references to French society and customs the later and more austere phase of Ellison's character is seen. It is manifested in the following *Note* to his *Narrative* and in his advice to English parents against sending their daughters to school in France: "Tremble England for the consequences!" "After urgent and repeated solicitations from relatives and friends—a reason almost universally assigned for similar productions being offered to the public—I have been induced to publish the following narrative: which is composed from notes, made immediately after my return from France, and what else my memory supplied at the time of writing. I have given a plain, unvarnished narrative of facts as they occurred without amplification or embellishment. From this narrative it must appear evident to the most cursory reader, what a thoughtless, reckless being I then was, wholly regardless of everything but the passing moment, without a thought of futurity, the chief concern of man. My present views on this (should be) all-absorbing topic, it will I hope be generally admitted, form a happy con-

trast. What these views are may be seen in a work of mine, printed in 1835, entitled *Rhantism*<sup>1</sup> *versus Baptism* (or Infant sprinkling against Christian Immersion), to a perusal of which I respectfully invite my reader, as a subject of incomparably deeper interest, and of infinite moment."

This invitation the present writer has respectfully declined. Ellison also wrote upon *The Millennium* (1850), and a letter to Joseph Gurney, Esq., about Baptism and the Lord's Supper, 1833.

Mr. J. F. Smith, chief librarian of Liverpool Public Libraries, has discovered that Ellison was a hide merchant from 1816 to 1832, with offices in Matthew Street. He lived in three different houses between 1816 and 1835, when he returned to his native Walton, where the *Prison Scenes* was written. This ancient village, dating from 1326, was formerly the mother-parish of Liverpool. It retained for many years a ghostly air of rusticity and charm—all vanished now except for the Church (long a landmark for ships), with its gravestones, and a few old houses, among grim urban surroundings. And here, according to a contemporary obituary notice, Seacome Ellison died on 24th June 1854, at his residence, Willow Bank, Walton on the Hill, in his eightieth year.

## NOTE UPON ELLISON'S JOURNEY.

### ROUTE THROUGH WURTEMBERG AND BAVARIA.

This, at several points, is obscure; Ellison has not always given sufficient or quite accurate data. I owe the following notes to the kindness of my friend Mr. Duncan J. Sloss, C.B.E., who has examined the route in the light of a map (enlarged) of the period (*Topographisch-militärische Carte von Teutschland*, Weimar, 1812-13). They summarise his conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> Greek *rhantismos*, sprinkling.

(1). p. 325 (Ellison, p. 149). "We came to the river Iller, and walked along its banks until we drew near to Biberach." But Biberach is on the left bank of the Riss, west of the Iller; not on the Iller.

(2) p. 326 (Ellison, p. 150). "We came to a bridge, unguarded, which we passed, and were not a little delighted to find ourselves on the left bank of the Iller." What they must have crossed was the Riss; the Iller was some fifteen miles to the east, and in that sense only were they on its "left side."

(3). p. 326 (Ellison, p. 150). "Then, coming to the junction of two roads, we saw by a finger-post that one led to Augsburg, the other to Memmingen." The old map marks such a fork at Illerdissen, due south of Ulm, and this *may* have been the spot.

(4). p. 328 (Ellison, p. 154). "On approaching a long covered bridge by which we had again to pass the Iller. . . ." The words "*again* to pass" remain unexplained; and it seems as though Ellison had missed out yet another crossing of the Iller, required to get him back into Bavaria, and to Memmingen. The Iller was the frontier between Bavaria and Wurttemberg. The statements about the crossings cannot be related to the data that Ellison gives; also, the available maps differ as to road alignments.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE REV. R. B. WOLFE AT GIVET

MR. WOLFE'S view<sup>1</sup> of the English prisoners in France is that of an earnest and convinced believer in Christian doctrine, and he writes in the religious phraseology of his time. This modest young clergyman, diffident about his

<sup>1</sup> *English Prisoners in France*, by Rev. R. B. Wolfe, Chaplain. Hatchard, 1830.

preaching and shy at first among the wordly and rather strident members of the "first circles of captivity," is one of the finest-tempered and most courageous characters among the *détenus*. He noted sadly at Verdun that a careless spirit was general and "vice gained like an infectious disorder." He was depressed about his weekly service. Though he was thankful for his "temporal blessings" and for much kindness at Verdun he at once acceded to a request of Captain Brenton that he should become chaplain to the British prisoners in France with a claim to choose his *dépôt* of residence.

"The time was now come," he writes, "when the Lord would provide a great harvest for the Kingdom of his Son. And he prepared his instrument, as the potter prepares his clay." And through this "open door," he entered, with his young wife and an increasing family, "the most reprobate spot that can be imagined," namely the *dépôt* for prisoners of war at Givet.

To this *dépôt* at the end of 1803 had come the crews of H.M.S. *La Minerve*, Captain (later Sir) Jaheel Brenton. Here too, in 1804, arrived the crew of the brig *Friendship* whose Captain, Josiah Sincock, died later at Verdun. The late Sir Edward Hain, in his preface to his *Prisoners of War in France from 1804-14*, quotes a letter sent to his seamen at Givet by Captain Brenton, sending money for their pay through the French commandant, with brave heartening words to his "good lads."

Mr. Short, one of two apprentices of nineteen and seventeen on the *Friendship* (captured off Beachy Head), preserved a copy of this letter throughout the ten years, four months and five days of his captivity. He and his cousin Mr. Williams wrote an account of their experiences in a brief clear style. Such writing at once becomes history. The faces of the Cornishmen are fine and reassuring, like many others in contemporary prints, in

spite of the tradition of ugly or facetious caricature and popular sentiment that is apt to obscure the characters and features of seamen in drama, fiction, poetry and art. It is easy to understand why Mr. Williams as a young man was chosen by his companions to ask for billets or food and why one French woman wanted to detain him. These diaries should be read with deep gratitude to the late Sir Edward Hain, who rescued them one hundred years after the writers arrived home.

"The town of Givet,"<sup>1</sup> says Short, "is situated on the left bank of the River Meuse, a walled town with a single rampart. On the South side of the river is another town, called Little Givet, reached by a bridge of sixteen boats . . . both towns are fortified and occupied by a strong garrison. . . . Grand Givet is commanded by a strong fortress called Charlemont, in which there are a number of barracks and hospitals, and a small town with a church. The citadel and rampart-wall are very strong. On the south side it is fortified by Nature, the cliffs being, I suppose, 300 yards perpendicular. This town is in the Department of Ardennes, in the French Netherlands." He gives the prices of food on his arrival in 1804. Good wheat bread, 3 lbs. sold for 2½d., flour ¼d. per pound, butter 5d. and beef 3½d. per pound; the brown bread as sold to the prisoners is 1d. per loaf. The French Government allowance was one pound bread, half a pound beef, a small quantity of wood, a thimbleful of salt, a noggin of peas and three farthings of money per day. The English charitable fund, called "Lloyds" by the seamen, was 1d. per day. The barracks were in a narrow pass between the almost perpendicular rock of the fortress of Charlemont and the river Meuse. The prisoners had, for exercise, a

<sup>1</sup> Fort in Department of Ardennes on left side of the Meuse opposite Givet near the Belgian frontier. Sir Edward Hain, *Prisoners of War in France*, 1914, p. 33.

narrow strip of ground which in summer was "a complete oven." They spent their small allowance in drink, "riot and excess" and were mostly ragged and half-famished.

Here Mr. Wolfe lived for six years, a lonely, determined figure, distrusted in the early years alike by the French authorities and by English prisoners. He never went to bed for two years without apprehensions of a journey to Bitche ("so little," he says, "to be desired"); and this, in spite of his courage and assured faith, filled his soul with a nightmare horror. But he showed tact, restraint, and firmness, and a genius for reforms. He succeeded in gradually improving the condition of the prisoners, who became more peaceable and sober, more satisfied and even cheerful, and the change was remarked upon by all who had to do with them.

"Formerly," says their chaplain, "they could only be restrained by force, and bolts and bars were the only means of keeping them safely. Now bolts and bars were vain and they constantly broke through them, but the Commandant was persuaded and acted entirely upon that persuasion that the only thing that could bind them was the moral obligation of their word; which given or implied, they never broke in any instance that came to my knowledge."

Mr. Wolfe established a school; his church services were thronged; he improved conditions in the hospital, where he found the patients neglected and verminous. He had experience of more than one commandant, good or bad, but his chief and constant friend and ally was Colonel Flayelle, Director of Engineers. He it was who contrived a cool place where the men could take exercise in summer, and provided the big storeroom or *grenier* for religious services, where the men crowded to excess, "and the Lord wrought powerfully among them." The schools were also established, and though the funds for all those objects were,

says Mr. Wolfe, "at that period of our captivity but scantily and with great difficulty obtained, we were yet able to carry on a system of education which for extent and usefulness and rapid progress made by them that were instructed, has perhaps been seldom equalled. It is indeed wonderful at how small an expense a number of persons, generally amounting to between four and five hundred, were taught to read and write, go through the highest rules in arithmetic, navigation in all its most difficult branches, construct charts and maps, and work at the practical part of their profession, as far as it can be learned from a form of a vessel, which had been admirably rigged for the purpose. Yet the small sums given to those among them who were capable of instructing their fellow-prisoners, as masters or assistants, were very useful.

"The sick men were as comfortable as in an English (or good French) hospital. . . . Extreme cleanliness succeeded to the state of filth in which I found them, and as wine, and many other things of a cordial or a nutritious nature were there abundant, and very reasonable, they had even greater comfort than would have been provided for them at home. And the consequence was that we had a smaller proportion of deaths, compared with the number of persons present than is scarcely ever known.

"Dr. Lawmont, surgeon of the *Vincego*, Captain Wright, who afterwards practised as a physician in Glasgow, obtained permission, about two years after my removal to Givet, to go and reside at that *dépôt*, in the exercise of his profession. He was making the journey on foot, when a party of *gendarmes*, who were conducting some felons, overtook him; and in spite of his passport, which he produced, he was strung to them by the hand, and marched to the next brigade."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wolfe relates a rather awkward dilemma about the wine, which by the way, was paid for

<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, p. 71.



out of the English Charitable fund. As the local wine was bad, Mr. Wolfe innocently ordered a pipe from Burgundy, and the men bottled it off in a cellar of his house. Thus he obtained "an excellent bodied wine" at fourpence halfpenny a bottle instead of paying sixpence halfpenny for the bad. But one morning, when the nurses came to carry away the wine ordered by the surgeon, Mr. Lawmont, they were stopped by *douaniers*, who said they were bound to seize the wine; and a heavy fine was to be feared. Mr. Wolfe, in alarm, applied to the General Inspector at Mézières, who, fortunately, had heard of the good work among the prisoners at Givet. He remitted the fine and instructed Mr. Wolfe how to act in future.

During a visit to Valenciennes Mr. Wolfe met a young Englishman, Cowel, who was teaching the school of that *dépôt*. He had trained the singers at the religious services very successfully. He lent Mr. Wolfe a notebook for the use of his prisoners. A seaman at Givet had also obtained a hymn-book from a friend in another *dépôt*. Mr. Wolfe says "that the singing at Givet was not indeed fully congregational singing; but the choir was so numerous, and so many from the congregation joined, that it approached it as near as possible and had this advantage over it that every one perfectly knew the psalm or hymn and had practised it before. The voices in the different parts were beautiful and the effect was heavenly." The condition of the prisoners at Givet was wonderfully changed. The Rev. Mr. Lee said when he visited Mr. Wolfe: "This is a most extraordinary thing; I have been through a *dépôt* of 1,500 sailors and not seen one drunken man!"

Mr. Wolfe began by getting two or three of the prisoners into his own service, and their good behaviour resulted in the gift from the commandant of more liberty to the others. Later, as many as two hundred were out of prison at one time, at work in the town, or residing there, or walking in

the country. It was said that the presence of Mr. Wolfe was better than numbers of *gendarmes*. But Mr. Wolfe himself says it may be well supposed "that Satan did not view these things with indifference." Trouble came in the form of an Irish officer in the French service who persuaded and bribed the men to desert. Mr. Wolfe had been absent on his duties as chaplain, and on his return to Givet met considerable parties of men who passed him with downcast looks and shame on their faces, on their way to the French army. Mr. Wolfe knew that most of them meant to run away and get home; and yet they were traitors and exposed, if taken, to capital punishment. Mr. Wolfe addressed his congregation after service next day. None of his usual audience were concerned, but he begged them to persuade the others. The exodus gradually ceased. "On this occasion," writes Mr. Wolfe, "I ought to make honourable mention of the midshipmen who were at that *dépôt* . . . they showed an extraordinary zeal to prevent the men from betraying their Country."

Both Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Short describe briefly the "lamentable circumstance of the attempted escape of Mr. Wm. Haywood, mate of H.M.S. *Alfred* and a native of Lichfield, and of Midshipman Gale." Before they had obtained their parole they had gone to market accompanied by a *gendarme*. They escaped from him and hid all day in the *souterrain*, a fortified mountain on the other side of the river. Towards evening they thought they heard a noise like a horse shaking himself, and the name of Mr. H. called loudly three times. "They left the place and in their fears, wished perhaps rather to be retaken than not. An unhappy Englishman, in the pay of the Commandant, saw them coming down the hill and instantly informed the *gendarme* from whom they had escaped. This guard had been drinking all day, and setting out after them, filled with rage, he soon overtook them

and with his sabre cut down Mr. H. who died immediately, and wounded Mr. G., who afterwards recovered. The prisoners would have taken summary vengeance upon the spy, had he not been taken out of their hands and kept out of the prison." Mr. Wolfe refused to give him his English money ("Lloyds.") The Commandant denounced Mr. Wolfe to the Minister of War, accusing him of helping the escape. "But I was not unknown by character to the Minister," and fortunately the former Commandant was in Paris, on his way back to Givet, and thought it for his interest to support me, and the treacherous Commandant was soon removed." Later three of the midshipmen came to Mr. Wolfe to ask for money upon bills drawn upon their friends; he gave it, "asking them, of course, no questions." Their subsequent attempts to get their parole taken away before attempting an escape were unsuccessful. Just at that time an order came from the Minister of War to send all the midshipmen from Givet to Verdun under a double escort of *gendarmes*. But the Commandant "took upon himself to send them upon their parole. And they walked all the way to that place without the least idea of escaping; although all the soldiers in France would scarcely have prevented them from making the attempt.

"... We had now done with the midshipmen. On some occasions they gave us great anxiety, as might be expected by those who knew what young persons of that age are, even under the restrictions of a school. They were ready on every occasion to crowd every sail, which the ebullition of animal spirits and elevated national feeling and exalted notions of the British Navy could give them; without the ballast of matured judgment and experience, when they thought that their enemies exulted over them, or oppressed the poor fellows. . . . Of these young gentlemen I can say nothing in a religious point of view; except

it be of Mr. T. who was very peculiar in his manner, but, I trusted and yet believe, was decidedly serious. But their conduct, as regarded their service and profession was so distinguished, and reflected so much credit on them, that it ought not to pass unnoticed." He adds rather wistfully: "It would give me exquisite pleasure should I hear if any of those young men, who dared so much and bore so much to regain the opportunity of distinguishing themselves in their Country's cause, are now fighting with equal boldness the good fight of faith in the service of the King of Kings. In that case they will not go without their reward." Upon his return from a visit on business to Verdun Mr. Wolfe writes:

"I shall never forget the sensation which I experienced one morning, when I went in as usual to early service. It was the depth of winter and darkness yet covered our place of bondage. Everything was cold and dismal and comfortless around me as I walked from my lodgings to the barracks, a distance of about three quarters of a mile. The cold had driven us out of the church,<sup>1</sup> except on the Lord's day, into a room which was then empty. There the men had got a stove, brought in benches, and made the place quite comfortable. On this dreary morning I entered it for the first time; and from cold and darkness came into a full and light and gladsome congregation. The moment I entered the choir struck up that beautiful and noble psalm, 'Oh come, loud anthems sing.' The music corresponded admirably to the words, which pealed, in exact unison, from a hundred joyful voices; and the effect was indescribable. I felt an extraordinary sensation of pleasure, and my morning sacrifice was unusually delightful."

<sup>1</sup> The large storeroom or *grenier* "capable of holding several thousand persons." p. 85, Wolfe.

## CHAPTER XXI

### VISIT OF NAPOLEON TO GIVET

DURING the last part of his captivity Mr. Wolfe had been urged by his brother in England to apply for three months' leave on parole. Lord Yarmouth then in England sent a "very obliging letter and certificate" to Mr. Wolfe's brother.

In November 1811 news came that Napoleon intended to pass through Givet on his return to Paris from a survey of the ports of France and Holland. All the officials, both civil and military, collected at the boundary of the department and division, very near Givet, to receive the Emperor, who was to be accompanied by some members of the Imperial Staff of headquarters. "I met them all," says Mr. Wolfe, "at the Baron de Bourdenchamp, Colonel Flayelle's, and from the interest he took about me they were all obliging, even to officiousness. I prepared a copy of my request for three months' leave to return home which they all signed." Marshal Moncey had arrived two days before his master with a party of *gendarmes* to prepare for the event. He showed Mr. Wolfe "marked attention" and kindness and advised him to put his *r clamation* into the hands of Marshal Mortier. A grand reception was prepared, but the great day proved miserably wet and the procession had to wade, silk stockings, dress shoes and all, ankle-deep in the black mud. They walked in pouring rain about a mile "within and without the town, the mayor repeating to himself a speech which he had prepared for the occasion of presenting the keys of the town. They arrived at the boundary of the department and awaited, in spite of the weather and dirt, the

coming of the Emperor. Couriers passed quickly, and at length the *cortège* arrived. It was nearly dark and yet there was light enough to distinguish this august company. The mayor announced who they were and what was their purpose. But not a word was deigned and the only answer was an additional crack from the whips of the postilions." They returned to the "palais," or best house in the place, prepared for Napoleon, and waited in the court "*à la belle étoile*." They had waited a considerable time when at length Caulaincourt<sup>1</sup> came out and said, "*Messieurs, sa Majesté l'Empereur ne reçoit pas.*"

The Emperor had decided to leave next morning at seven o'clock and to see only the Directeur des Fortifications, Baron Flayelle. "It was however," says Mr. Wolfe, "ordained otherwise and for purposes as regards myself no doubt, connected with goodness and mercy. . . . On the arrival of Maréchal Mortier with the Emperor, the Flayelles sent to beg Mrs. Wolfe and myself to pass the evening. He was a man of great elegance of manners, much natural kindness, and a total absence of hauteur, and that supercilious reserve which arises from conscious superiority. He spoke good English and conversed much with Mrs. Wolfe and myself. The baroness had given him my paper and said everything upon the subject that friendship could suggest; and he observed, on taking leave, that the first words he should say to Bonaparte the next morning would be to commend to him my request.

"In this short interval many unexpected occurrences were to happen. On my first looking out next morning I was extremely surprised by seeing a number of our men at work upon the river. The Meuse separates the two

<sup>1</sup> Caulaincourt was then Maréchal of the Imperial Palace. *Napoleon the Gaoler*, by Edward Fraser, p. 82.

towns of Givet and is, there, a river of some magnitude. Charlemont, one of the fortresses retained by the allies under the stipulations of the Peace of Paris, is a high, and on that side, an inaccessible mountain joining the greater Givet. Whoever is acquainted with the history of the Netherlands, and especially the invasion of Holland by the Duke of Brunswick, is aware of the importance which was formerly given to that place by its position, standing at the extremity of a tongue of land, which joins it to France, and surrounded, with the exception of that strip of country, by the territory of the Emperor. Hence arose the policy of these two towns being joined only by a temporary bridge, constructed with boats joined together. These were partially removed whenever barges passed through, or there was an apprehension of their being carried away through frost or flood. The latter cause was apprehended from the incessant rain which fell the day Napoleon arrived. A new bridge was then being built and an inspector was there for the purpose. He was called, and Caulaincourt asked if there was any fear of the bridge being intercepted during the night. He said 'No.'

"'Will you answer for it.'

"'I will.'

"The river rose high in the night. In spite of every effort the bridge went down at three in the morning. A consultation was held. Caulaincourt flew into such a dreadful rage that he struck the inspector. No means could be suggested for re-instating the bridge which was carried down the river with a current altogether irresistible. Every person accustomed to the management of it was gone to bed, fatigued with the labours of the night before; and they had very generally been celebrating the Emperor's arrival at the different *cabarets*. The Directeur des Fortifications was sent for. 'You will do nothing,'

said he, 'except you send to the barracks, and get some of the English prisoners.'

"Caulaincourt was surprised. 'Will you answer for them?' he asked.

"'With my head,' replied the worthy baron. And our honest fellows fully answered to his confidence.

"'Thirty of them were immediately set to work and they really had the appearance of amphibious animals, in the shape, and with an extraordinary share of the intelligence, of men. Some working up to their necks in water, others skimming in little light boats against this rapid current, as if they were going with the stream. At one time, swimming to a place which they could not otherwise reach; at another, diving to a vast depth to carry on their work. . . . I immediately sent out my servant with some brandy, and gave each of them a little, to prevent them from taking cold. And as I thought it very probable that they might obtain their liberty I allowed him to go and help them; and many men who had permission to live out in the town did the same."

An English lady, then in Givet, was anxious to solicit her release. She had stood the night before by the side of the kindly mayor. She now wished to cross the river and present her petition in person to Bonaparte. Mr. Wolfe says she had personal beauty, and he thought she might succeed if he could get an entrance for her into the "palais." For himself, he wished not to be seen by Napoleon, who was with Mortier (the Duc de Treviso).<sup>1</sup> "He would, I knew, bring me into his [Napoleon's] notice, which I was determined to avoid, that there might be no ground for supposing if I should succeed in my own wishes, that I had made any unworthy submission or even at all obtained my liberty or parole, personally, from him." They

<sup>1</sup> Treviso (French *Treviso*) about 18 miles north of Venice. Taken in 1797 by the French under Mortier, later Duc de Treviso.



crossed the river in a boat and the crowd being great, placed themselves before a window, Wolfe standing out of sight. Napoleon came to the window and viewed the men at work from time to time, with astonishment. Of the group of petitioners he "took no more notice than if they had been dogs."

Then Mr. Wolfe devotes some pages to a description of the man "whom the Lord had raised up, as he formerly did Pharaoh for this cause—for to shew him in his power." Napoleon had at first been absolutely furious, but cooled down after a sleep; and after breakfast became "affable and familiar in the extreme, and as I saw him in the window and narrowly observed his actions and his countenance, I could not help thinking I saw something like apprehension. He was without guards, and he knew he had to pass through them whom he considered his natural enemies." But whether he felt his situation or not he showed no fear. He set the nervous mayor at ease as if by magic and chatted with him about his family and affairs. "I never in my life saw a man capable in an instant, of such a change of countenance. At one moment he would seem to look through a person, with knit brows and fierceness so terrible as scarcely to seem human. In the next moment, his countenance would light up and exhibit an appearance of sprightliness and good humour which is rarely seen in man."

When Mr. Wolfe succeeded in getting Mrs. M., the English lady, into the house, Caulaincourt came out in a great rage, but softened on seeing "a very interesting young person; and, learning her object, called the Duc de Treviso, who placed her near the Emperor as he passed, and she presented her petition.

'Que voulez-vous, Madame?'

'Sire, ma liberté!'

'Et votre Époux?'

'Il est parti, Sire.'

'Ha! en ce cas, il n'est pas difficile.'

The Empress Marie Louise looked very kindly at Mrs. M., and curtsied as she passed.

"On leaving the Palais, Napoleon went down to the river . . . the English were still working at the bridge, which they had nearly finished. He began to talk to one of them through Mortier, who was standing with him, and they all came round him. And now, any one of these men who would have gone up to a cannon's mouth to have destroyed this enemy in battle, might with one push have sent him to the bottom of the Meuse to rise no more. With good reason they might have said of him that he made the world as a wilderness and destroyed the cities thereof, and opened not the house of his prisoners. Yet far from having any evil thoughts towards him, when he confided in their good faith, they were a sort of *garde d'honneur* to him, as he passed the river. And so great was the confidence that he had in them, that he would have no one else about him; and there was not a single Frenchman allowed to be upon the flying bridge which they had constructed to bring him over.

"He was also most liberal in his kindness to them; for before he passed, the Duke of Treviso sent the mayor to find me, to request that I would have a list made out of the men who had worked at the bridge and to inform me that they would all have their liberty, that I should have mine, and Mrs. M.'s was granted also, to her. . . . And now these great ones of the earth quitted the place, leaving every one full of joy and loud in the praises of Napoleon, except the inspector of the bridge, who was in a state of very sad depression.

"The Emperor had been on a survey of the northern parts of France and Holland, and was recalled by an express to repair to the Capital without delay. This was

about the time of the breaking out of the war with Russia.

"The guards with which he left Paris, a body of lancers, passed through Givet the next day, the horses being so fatigued that they could not keep the Emperor company, and so were left a day's journey behind."

At first only twelve men were set at liberty. They were given handsome sailors' clothing and money for the journey home. Mrs. M. got her passport. Mr. Wolfe's was for three months only, on parole. He thought the Commandant bore him ill-will. He had long struggled with the officials to have the men's money allowances paid to them without deduction.

Mr. Wolfe set off for Paris, the released men being "soon on the road." He left his wife and family at Givet. His small private store "laid up in an evil hour for a few months excursion upon his marriage," was long since exhausted. The expense of the long double journey was prohibitive. At Paris Mr. Wolfe was received with extreme kindness by Marshal Mortier, Duc de Treviso, who was mortified to hear how affairs had turned out. He promised to see the Minister of War, after a talk over the dinner-table. Marshal Berthier who had also been at Givet, was interested too and promised to do all he could to set more of the men at liberty. Mr. Wolfe himself considered the list had swelled to about fifty, not all of whom had been effectively employed on the bridge. Mr. Short puts the number at forty-five.

When Marshal Berthier found that Mr. Wolfe was alone in Paris he declared that "nothing could be further from the intentions of the French Government than to keep ladies prisoners." Passports were despatched for Mrs. Wolfe and the children and they reached Paris safely. This was a relief, for Mr. Wolfe had not now to face the thoughts of leaving his wife to travel home alone; "an unprotected

female with six small children, one in arms and another sick and scarcely out of them, and not even the nurse or any servant, French or English, permitted to accompany them." Then one day, "when I went to dine with the Marshal he came up to receive me with more than the usual pleasure in his countenance and said:

'Well, Mr. Wolfe, we have at length got leave for two more of your men to return home.'

"This was all we could accomplish, and the number who finally obtained their liberty on this occasion was fourteen men, Mrs. M., Mr. Sevrigh of the packet service, and, subsequently myself."

Mr. Wolfe lingered in Paris to try to obtain a passport for the children's nurse, and at length obtained one to Morlaix; but he had to pay for her long journey home to her friends. He also made an earnest but fruitless attempt to suggest through Marshal Mortier a general exchange of prisoners. Mr. Wolfe had been introduced to the under-secretary of the war department, who showed him much kindness and gave effectual advice. "Mr. Wolfe," he asked one day, "What are you doing in Paris?"

"You know," I answered, "that my stay has two objects, that of obtaining for the men the passports they were led to expect, and, for myself, the liberty which was granted me." He was then advised to leave "without a day's delay" and send his *réclamation* from London. Mr. Wolfe took the hint and left Paris in twenty-four hours. This was early in January 1812, and the long journey to Morlaix was painful, with companions who were anxious to get on and had no weak little children to consider. At Morlaix they had letters to a merchant named Diot from the Committee at Verdun. He procured a small vessel for the travellers. The crew consisted of the captain, one old man and two boys, who could not even walk the deck, and there was no compass. But the Captain was

"a skilful man and made a happy guess at the course. . . . As morning broke, after a quick though dangerous passage, we discovered land and found that we had come in a direct line for the river [Dart]. From Dartmouth we sailed up the river to Totness. . . . And ourselves, and our six children left little room to spare in the chaise, as we travelled on from that place to London where we arrived on the last days of January 1812."

The final liberation in answer to Mr. Wolfe's *réclamation*, "came not till I was beginning to think of the necessity of returning to Givet to redeem the pledge I had given. . . . For some of our poor fellows I have been able to procure situations in this country, which their instruction in Givet rendered them capable of and to which their good conduct during the period of their imprisonment recommended them. And I have been informed of many who are now occupying stations exceedingly superior to their original prospects in life; having been taught even to read and write, during their captivity as prisoners of war in France."

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE NARRATIVE OF JOSHUA DONE, *DÉTENU* AND PRISONER FROM 1802-1813

To the Editor (Theodore Hook),

*The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist.*

(Part the First, 1841.)

SIR,

In presenting to the readers of the *New Monthly Magazine* [volume LXI, 1841] the following statement of my ten years of captivity in France, Germany and Italy, I can safely affirm

that I am not induced to do so by any feeling of vanity, but by the earnest wish that the extraordinary and almost incredible positions in which I have been placed, may afford information and amusement. The hairbreadth escapes I have encountered improbable as they may appear to superficial observers, are attested by many living witnesses. In relating my adventures, I have endeavoured, as much as possible, to avoid egotism. Nevertheless, I own it is with a certain degree of pride and satisfaction I review that part of my life, wherein I was enabled to render essential services to my fellow-captives, through my acquaintance with the French language.

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

JOSHUA DONE.

Joshua Done, at the age of sixteen, left his native city, London, to visit Paris, in 1802, during the Peace of Amiens. He wished to study French and music. He walked from London to Dover, and from Calais to Paris, "carolling as merrily and thoughtlessly as the birds," and, as innocently, walking into a snare. He studied at the *Conservatoire de Musique*, under Mehul and Cherubini; he "delighted in comic opera and vaudeville." When war broke out again, Done was amongst the *détenus*, but, because of his youth, was allowed to remain in Paris. A careless speech was reported and he was afterwards ordered to proceed alone, on parole, from Meaux (ten leagues from Paris), to Verdun. He walked there with a young Frenchman. "Here I remained pretty comfortably about a year and a half, teaching French to my countrymen, and English to the natives, and music to both parties."

Having twice forgotten to attend muster, he was sent to Bitche, through deep snows, on a fatiguing road.

Here he relates, "I was thrust into a subterraneous vault or casement, containing the most savage and desperate

characters ever met with. Being saluted with the epithets 'nor-wester,' and 'long-coated,' I was compelled, notwithstanding my exhausted state, to fight in my own defence, a drunken sailor having assaulted me for that express purpose. However, collecting all my energies into one phrensiéd attack, I had the good fortune to lay my antagonist senseless, when his blackguard companions ceased to molest me, and I was left at leisure to converse with more respectable characters. The term 'nor-wester' was applied to the *détenus*, they having been supposed to have gone over to France with a North-west wind, *that* being the most favourable for the passage from Dover to Calais."

The little *souterrain* in which Done was confined contained about 130 British captives. He goes on to describe some of the attempts made by prisoners to escape from Bitche. After two months in hospital with fever, he was put in the large *souterrain*.

"Shortly after my arrival [at Bitche] I was transferred to a room in the barracks. . . . General Stack, Sir Beaumont Dixie, Colonel Whaley, and several others had rooms to themselves, for which they paid handsomely.

"Innumerable were the foolish freaks invented by the despairing and persecuted British captives in this fortress to while away the time. Cards, dice, and every species of gaming, drinking, fighting, quarrelling, succeeded each other with fearful rapidity, undermining the constitutions of the most hardy, and leaving them victims to the first disease that assailed them. Those who had more serious desires, were compelled at times to join in the general madness, in order to avoid the greater evil or being subject to the malevolence of the immense majority. The only chance for a man of sedentary habits was to rise at day-break, while his comrades were wrapt in slumber; then, and only then, might he obtain a short respite from the

confused and heart-rending scenes that surrounded him. Gaming was carried to such an extent, that some of the prisoners have been known to lose every article of clothing they possessed, and to lie in bed until they received a fresh supply of cash, which they invariably squandered away in the same disgraceful manner.

"Not even the numerous services I had rendered my hapless companions by advocating their interests with the French authorities could, at all times, secure my books and papers from injury and demolition; and many a sigh and pang have I experienced, from the loss of some composition that had cost me weeks of anxious and unremitting labour."

After twenty months, Done was permitted to return to Verdun, on parole. He says, "it is but strict justice to my fellow-captives at Verdun to state, that I never met with a more honourable feeling than that displayed by the great majority of them on all occasions. It is true they were subject to great mortifications and to great temptations; but with very few exceptions, they fully maintained the honour and interest of their native land." Done, however, got into trouble with authority. He was reported, it appears, for playing "God Save the King" upon the organ in Verdun Cathedral, being unaware that he could suffer capital punishment for doing so. Ellison remarks that he had heard "Rule Britannia," and "The Duke of York's March" performed there by an Englishman. Done himself says "the British prisoners were highly delighted when I introduced the above tune in my closing voluntary, with the full power of the organ, which contained a number of stops and pedals, and had a fine and imposing effect."

Done heard that he was, therefore, to be sent again to Bitch; and made up his mind to escape. He left Verdun in June 1810, after seven years' captivity, intending to reach "St Maloes" [St. Malo]. He did this, on foot,



he says, in eleven days (480 miles), and was never questioned by *gendarmes* the whole way. He was joyful when he saw the sea and "a few specks" which he took to be British cruisers. Some fishermen, in whom he confided and to whom he paid ten Napoleons in advance, promised to put him on an English vessel. But they betrayed him, and he was arrested and taken to Solidor Tower.<sup>1</sup>

"I had become quite reconciled to my confinement in the Tower; as I had liberty to walk round the top of it during the whole day; the distant view I thus obtained from it, and the use of books and papers, etc., [consoled me] for the failure of this first attempt at escape." He mentions the general hospitality he had met with from the cottagers on his road.

After a distressing journey in handcuffs he reached Verdun again in October, was put in the round tower within the citadel, and placed on a diet of bread and water. This was after "an altercation" with Colonel Courcelles, to whom Done declared that he would escape ultimately in spite of all efforts to detain him. His account of his own remarks, which would have tried the temper of a schoolmaster, let alone the French commandant of a fortress, certainly "filled up the climax" of his misdeeds. He and some midshipmen then set to work to make a hole in the wall of the tower. The materials extracted filled two palliasses, but the jailer happened to place his hand upon one of them, and then examined the wall, "with a face of ghastly paleness."

The culprits were next placed in *Port Chaussé*, the military prison, and "thrust into a dark dungeon." In a few weeks' time Done again contracted "prison" fever, and was sent to hospital for two months. Shortly after his return he was placed in the upper part of the prison, with

<sup>1</sup>"Nothing could exceed the vigilance of the French in their seaports, and even throughout their extensive line of coast."

a Captain and two Lieutenants, one of whom was named Jackson. They all forced their way through the ceiling into a garret, where the window was unbarred. From thence they attempted to escape, but they were discovered.

At the beginning of autumn, Done was ordered to Briançon, and the others to "Biche" [Bitche]. "Some of us," he says, "escaped during the first stage. I flew to the woods on the banks of the Rhine' and during three days subsisted entirely on chestnuts." He was soon retaken and with the other prisoners was now escorted by *gendarmes* and troops of the line.

"Frost and snow had now commenced, and we had a most wearisome march from Grenoble to Gapp,<sup>1</sup> notwithstanding the musical strains of one of our companions named Atkinson (from York) who played on his flute during the greater part of our journey."

The Fortress of Briançon<sup>2</sup> appeared grand and majestic. It commanded the road to Turin and had seven forts. In one named *Les Trois Têtes* the prisoners were lodged, after being told by the commandant, who ordered his guards to "prime, load, make ready and present," that escapers would be shot. Here Done's bed-fellow the flutist, Atkinson, died of a spotted fever. Later, Done was confined with thirteen others in a dungeon cut out of the rock. The continual drip of water soaked fresh straw in twenty-four hours. A small wicket, a foot square, admitted daylight. In ten or twelve days the prisoners had unhinged the door. The guard-house, with about twenty-four men in it, was within six yards of the dungeon. It stood under an archway, in sight of the gate to Italy, which was kept open all day for communication with the inhabitants of

<sup>1</sup> The Atlas gives name as Gap.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Williams, the Cornish seaman, gives a terrible account of conditions during his two years at Briançon. But he and Done were well known as desperate "deserters."

See also the fine *Diary of Peter Bussell*, pp. 104-9 (Peter Dowie Ltd.).

Briançon and other villages. "This gate was opened at six in the morning. At half-past six on Sunday, 26th April, I took leave of my companions," says Done, "and alone sallied out of the Italian gate, having watched the opportunity when the sentry had paced half his beat, about fifty yards. The soldiers in the guard-house were probably asleep."

Done went on, "at a leisurely pace," and met no one, but turned round on hearing footsteps. He then saw midshipman Hare, who had followed him, (with three others, who were retaken the same day). Done and Hare continued together and in half an hour, they heard the sound of guns and all the village bells. They then climbed a high mountain and had a full view of the pursuit.

The whole garrison sallied out after them, leaving a few sentries to guard the fortress, but the escapers, hidden among the bushes, defied their efforts. At sunset the soldiers retired into the fortress, firing a parting volley. Done and Hare had no food all day. "Keeping on the ridges of the highest mountains, we soon gained the high road, and proceeded cautiously along for fear of wolves and *gendarmes*, the latter causing us much more dread than the former, which occasionally howled around us, we pushed on toward Suza [Susa]." Darkness and a storm gave them a certain sense of security, and they found a cottage at daybreak. Here, with black bread and goat milk, they broke a forty-hour fast.

They travelled on through Susa, reaching Turin in five days, "amongst a kind and most hospitable people." There Hare was retaken, but Done escaped to the mountains. He kept on the right bank of the river Po, hoping to reach Genoa and get a passage on a neutral vessel. After three days among the mountains of Piedmont and their "kind and obliging inhabitants," Done crossed the river and reached Alessandria della Paglia. This he

says "is reckoned one of the strongest places in Italy, being situated in the midst of a plain, and at the junction of two rapid rivers, the Bormida and the Tanaro." Here were numbers of galley-slaves at work on the fortifications, and also numbers of *gendarmes*. And here, on 10th May, Done was recaptured.

He was told that two officers had escaped from Bitche, one a fair man, the other, Lieutenant Jackson, (who had attempted escape at Verdun with Done) brown with dark eyes, and very like him. Hearing also that the lieutenant had escaped to England, Done resolved to personate him, and try and escape on the way back to Bitche. The *Maréchal des logis* decided that his prisoner was Jackson, and when Done asked him how he could guess so well, he remarked "*C'est que nous sommes malins, nous autres.*"

"My route lay through Alessandria, after passing Marengo, which is situated about halfway betwixt the former place and Novi. The *gendarme* who conducted me had served at the celebrated battle of Marengo, which decided the fortunes of Napoleon. He pointed out to me among other positions, the village church of Marengo, from the steeple of which Napoleon is said to have made his observations previous to the contest that had nearly stopped his successful career."

At the summit of Mount Cenis, where, says Done, "a cold dungeon awaited him," he heard that Hare had passed through some three weeks before, on his road to Sedan Castle. At Chambéry he again fell ill of fever, and was put into hospital. This he describes as a "splendid establishment, the nurses whereof were nuns, who performed the various duties required by patients afflicted with the most loathsome diseases. They were particularly kind to me, attending to me with all the care and anxiety of a relative. In about six weeks, being convalescent, I took leave of these pious 'sisters,' as they were termed, and

I was conducted in a cart to the borders of Savoy, through rugged roads, shaking my weary and aching limbs in the most horrible manner imaginable. At length the delightful plains of France struck my astonished senses. . . . I was escorted into Bourgouin by the very same *gendarme* from whom I had escaped on my road from Lyons to Grenoble, but he did not recognise me." Done was thinner and differently dressed, and had a different name.

He was marched through Lyons, Besançon, Nancy, Metz, Sarrelouis, Saarbruck, Forbach and Sarreque-mines, and at length arrived at Bitche, after a journey of three months.

"A grand scene was preparing for me in the barrack-yard of the fortress . . . the commandant having ordered the troops to form a line, and the British prisoners taking part in the ceremony.

"The principal character was now ushered in by a *gendarme* as Lieutenant Jackson, who had lately escaped from there."

The commandant inquired where he was? Then Done stepped forward and bowing, gave his real name and his reasons for concealing it. He had prepared a speech, relating his miseries at Briançon and his dread of returning there. He had heard of the kindness and humanity of the commander and "determined to give the preference to his *dépôt*, and trusted he would not be angry." He was treated by the Commandant with more lenity than he expected.

In a month's time Done was sent to Sedan Castle.<sup>1</sup> "Napoleon was then on his fatal march to Moscow, but to the British captives, his career seemed more prosperous than ever." Later Done says, "we received what we called 'the horse-bulletin,' where mention was made of the loss of Napoleon's cavalry in Russia."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lord Blayney's *Account of Sedan Prison*, Vol. 2, pp. 456-59.

From Sedan Castle Done made one of his cleverest escapes. He says: "As I bore some resemblance to the commandant's secretary, I procured a cloak similar to that he usually wore, and taking a large account-book under my arm, I sallied out of the barrack-yard, and passed the sentry (of the Polish regiment) while my companions were looking at me from the windows." Had the sentry been French, their looks and gesture would, Done thought, have given him away. It was near noon, the guard was about to be relieved, the drummers were practising, and the guard paid no attention to Done, who passed by a guard-house and two gates with their drawbridges. At one of these, a boy who knew him well and was a shrewd fellow, was too busy with rats in the castle-ditch to notice him. Now the commandant's house had to be passed, but not even the secretary himself (whom Done was personating) chanced to look up from his writing.

Done arrived at Verdun by daylight next morning, and obtained a fresh supply from friends there. He passed through Paris and Rouen, arriving safely at Dieppe. But in his search for a boat, he was arrested at Havre-de-Grâce, after arranging to join an American ship. He was ordered back to Sedan Castle, and a week or two later was sent off with forty prisoners, escorted by a Captain and troops of the line, to Embrun near Briançon. After a stop in Verdun, (where Done promised his friends that he would return) he deserted at the next stage on the road, St "Mihel" [Mihiel]; arrived back at Verdun, and easily found an entrance, as the walls were in a dilapidated condition. Here a friend concealed him for twelve days.

Done now set out for Germany, managed to buy a *passee* at Strassburg, and crossed the Rhine. But he was arrested at "Stutgard [Stuttgart] in Württemberg" and confined, with extreme severity, in Asperg Castle. Here one of the Tyrolean chiefs, also a prisoner, persuaded Done to have

patience, saying that Napoleon had met with serious reverses. In a few days the tidings came of the defeat of Napoleon by the troops of the Confederation of the Rhine.

Done wrote at once to the king of Württemberg to claim his liberty; and on the very same day a commissary with three post-horses arrived at Asperg and conducted him to Stuttgart, and into the presence of Count Taube. "It was then midnight, and the count was as pale as death, affected no doubt by the fallen fortunes of Napoleon, and by the dreary prospect that event gave him concerning his own probable disgrace. He presented to me in the name of the King, a passport and a bag of small coin of that realm, containing about fifteen pounds to pay the expenses of my journey to Prague, in Bohemia."

Done now began to feel the value of liberty; he had a hearty reception from the people in Ulm, the frontier town of Bavaria. Here he met a charming Russian officer, and together they glided down the Danube to Ratisbon on rafts, both speaking fluent French.

"... On my arrival at Prague, I found Lord Aberdeen had quitted it to attend the Emperor of Austria, at the Allied headquarters. However, his physician, Dr. Price, whom he had left at Prague, afforded me the most valuable assistance. At that period this city contained more amateur musicians than any town in Germany; its inhabitants being intelligent, peaceable, and extremely hospitable. . . . Here I bought a cossack horse for five pounds, and on him I set out for Bremen, that being the most likely port for obtaining a passage to England.

"The French being still at Dresden, I bent my way towards Leipsic, and passed over the field of battle on the November 23, five weeks after it took place. The high road still bore vestiges of the strife: innumerable remnants of dress and accoutrements that formerly belonged to combatants of every nation, arm and grade, engaged in that

memorable conflict, strewed the paths, ditches, hedges and fields in every direction. Thirty thousand sick and wounded were in the hospitals outside the gates of Leipsic, but on entering that city there was not the slightest trace of the dreadful struggle that had so recently taken place. . . . I now continued my route to Bremen. The Weser was then frozen up, so that I was compelled to proceed to Cuxhaven, where I embarked, having passed through Hanover. . . . The Duke of Cambridge disembarked at Cuxhaven on the very day I sailed from thence. After two days of tempestuous weather, we anchored at Heligoland, where I was hospitably treated by the merchants at that place. In a few days the packet from thence to England took me on board, and I arrived at Harwich on the December 29, 1813, after an absence from my native land of eleven years and a half."

Tolstoy says that truth-telling is a very difficult thing and that young people are rarely capable of it. The reader must judge for himself. The *Narrative* was pointed out to me by the late Mr. G. E. Manwaring, who also gave me much kind help in a selection of books from the London Library.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### VERDUN. 1803-14

#### *Part I*

UNDER Napoleon's edict of 1803, all Englishmen "enrolled in the militia" in France between the ages of eighteen and sixty were arrested and detained as captives.



Some English residents remained in Paris or the provinces without difficulties.

At first there were three main *dépôts*, one at Fontainebleau, one at Nîmes and one at Valenciennes. Later Boys gives the following list of *dépôts*: Verdun, Sarrelouis, Givet, Arras, Valenciennes, Longwy, Briancon, Mont Dauphin, Bitche, Cambrai, Sedan, Auxonne. Lord Blayney mentions Nancy as a *dépôt* for Spanish officers.

A small number of English were sent at first to Verdun. Among those at Fontainebleau were the Rev. R. B. Wolfe and his wife and infant. He remained nine years in France in the *dépôts* of Fontainebleau, Verdun and Givet. He describes the *détenus* at Fontainebleau as embracing every rank from "those who moved in the first circles to the lowest order of mechanics and even labourers."

All had to be within doors at ten o'clock. But one Sunday morning in December 1803 a drum was heard "beating about the town," and all the *détenus* were ordered to quit Fontainebleau in twenty-four hours and proceed to Verdun. Snow lay on the ground, when this strange journey began, with all the carriages in the town, some persons going in carts or on horseback, and many on foot. Nearly all the travellers were in discomfort, many had already exhausted their funds and incurred debt; it was not possible for even the richest to get money at such short notice. The poor people had to travel without a penny and with no change of linen (their clothes being retained by unpaid landlords) a hundred leagues, many with young children. Mr. Wolfe looked on it all as "an emblem of human life," and met the hardships with philosophy and an inclination to turn annoyance and anger into laughter and envied the Frenchman his *gaieté de coeur*.<sup>1</sup>

A few privileged captives were permitted to remain in Paris, with all its attractions for artists, scholars and men

<sup>1</sup> *English Prisoners in France*, Wolfe, pp. 28-32.

of the world; also at Fontainebleau, pleasantly near the capital. Tours, in beautiful country, seemed to offer fewer restrictions and had a tradition of generous English visitors. We have seen how happy Captain and Mrs. Brenton and their friends were there; and Mr. Forbes, on a visit to his brother, a prisoner of war, describes him as "experiencing little of captivity but the name."

It was at Tours that midshipman James met with generous help and kindness from a rich Englishman, Mr. Cane. Indeed, the poor fellow and his men quite broke down over the welcome prepared for them. James was able to procure money on a bill on his friends at home: "I was become my lord Anglais," he says. He records that food was plentiful and cheap (1804).<sup>1</sup>

At Valenciennes General de Boubers was also an humane and honoured Commandant. Here the English had two clubs and a playhouse. "The hospitality of Lord Barrington . . . offered a resource to the first *détenus*. . . . His poorer countrymen when in distress were fed from his Kitchen; nor was his humanity less to the British sailors . . . who were frequently marched in the depth of winter, without a shoe to their feet. . . . Whenever any of the miserable parties passed through Valenciennes, half famished and half naked, Lord Barrington interceded with the General to procure them any indulgence, sent them a comfortable dinner, and often provided them with clothes and other necessities for their march at his own expense."<sup>2</sup>

But "evasions" became the fashion at Valenciennes.

These early escapes were gallant and spectacular, and accounted for the severer measures of repression adopted at the *dépôts* after the first years. A man with a wooden leg tied a rope to a poker and let himself down from a high

<sup>1</sup> *Napoleon the Gaoler*, by Edward Fraser, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, *Picture of Verdun*, Vol. 1, p. 41.

rampart at Valenciennes; he bought an old horse from a peasant, promising to return it if the owner would take him a certain distance; then, he hired a *cabriole* and reached the Rhine in it. A Lancashire gentleman had a clever French valet who procured two passports and packed up the luggage. Mr. B—— left a large dinner-party and drove away in his travelling chaise, called on his banker at Cologne, and passed into Germany. This escape was said to be particularly cool and deliberate. Three Englishmen, one an officer in the army, called upon General de Boubers, the respected and generous Commandant at Valenciennes, who showed the greatest kindness and politeness to the *détenus*, and, "being accustomed to the usages of honourable war, appeared not to relish the office of a jailer." The Englishmen thanked the General for his civilities, and each returned his *carte de sortie*, without which he could not pass the sentinels at the town gates. They said they did not consider themselves as lawful prisoners and intended to escape. He seems to have been too much astonished to arrest them on the spot; they bowed, quitted him, and mounted their horses, already saddled, and rode out of the town without loss of time. Disguised as peasants they reached a village on the German side of the Rhine, formerly a suburb of Cologne. Their English carriage and luggage was permitted to follow them from Valenciennes, "to lull them with security," and finally they had a narrow margin of safety. The *cartes de sortie* were, however, taken from the other *détenus* and a muster called twice a day instead of once a fortnight. So the fine gesture of the escapers left, as usual, some sorrow behind. Others escaped later "like galley slaves" says Lawrence, "who had broke loose from the hulks and were running for their lives."<sup>1</sup>

So while the English from Fontainebleau travelled un-

<sup>1</sup> *Picture of Verdun*, Vol. 1, pp. 46-7 and 50.

attended, those from Valenciennes, also sent to Verdun, had to pay for their company of *gendarmes* at five shillings a day with food and drink for each guard. General de Boubers, who did everything in his power to soften the rigour of his orders, and took leave of his prisoners almost with tears in his eyes, had recommended them to make parties to go on the same day, so that one guard might take charge of several carriages and expense be lessened. Thus, officers of the English navy and army and *détenus* from various towns, including elderly men and men with young families, arrived at Verdun in December 1803. Many visitors had originally come to France to economise in living and education, and had already arranged for their winter's rent and fuel. Some with their children travelled in open carts while others had to struggle on foot through the snow.

The ancient and fortified city of Verdun, with its Cathedral and many churches, monasteries and convents, standing on a hill, looked down on the Meuse and its tributary streams: it looked upon meadows and fruitful orchards and vineyards, on the dark forests massed on more distant hillsides, which were frequented by wolves, wild boar and deer. Lord Blayney describes the citadel and part of the town as "standing on the summit and declivity of a rocky eminence on the west bank of the river [Meuse], and the rest of the town on several islands in it . . . the works are allowed to go to ruin and dismantled of artillery. The ramparts which surround the town are about three miles in circuit, with regular outworks, and being planted with trees afford a pleasant promenade."<sup>1</sup> During the revolution many of the churches and rich houses of the religious communities were destroyed, or closed and desecrated to the use of store-rooms or prison cells. Verdun, destined to make history again more than

<sup>1</sup> Lord Blayney, Vol. 2, pp. 158-59.

a century later, was then famous for its pure light wine and liqueurs, cakes and comfits. "Its *dragées* even constituted one of the luxuries of the seraglios of Constantinople and the Imperial Palace of Petersburg."<sup>1</sup>

As a prison and place of detention for British officers and civilians, a new and sinister Verdun was created by Napoleon, policed by the base Wirion, and sponsored for the first years by Lord Yarmouth<sup>2</sup> and his associates. For many Englishmen the Palais Royal in Paris was then "the coffee-house of Europe," as Lawrence so deftly remarks.

Mr. Goldsworthy Alger's *Englishmen in the French Revolution*,<sup>3</sup> published in 1889, includes a chapter on Napoleon's captives and life at Verdun. Mr. Edward Fraser's historical record,<sup>4</sup> containing a detailed account of Verdun and narratives, was published in 1914. In *Napoleon's Visitors and Captives, 1801-15*, Mr. Alger gives an analysis and list of the visitors to France in 1801-15, and of the British prisoners and *détenus*. His access in the French archives to the police records prepared daily for the exacting eye of Napoleon himself, his journalistic knowledge of the men and women in society, in politics, letters and arts; his long residence in Paris, and his deep interest in the chronicles of scandal, all produce a fairly bewildering maze of names, intrigue, adventures and destinies.

It is beyond the scope of this book of narratives, and the capacities of the writer, to give more than the short account of Verdun and some other *dépôts* which is contained in this and the following chapters.

For the history of the unfortunate captives we can only

<sup>1</sup> Lord Blayney, Vol. 2, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Later Lord Hertford, and said to be the original of Thackeray's "Lord Steyne," and of Beaconsfield's "Lord Monmouth."

<sup>3</sup> John G. Alger, who died in 1907. *Englishmen in the French Revolution, 1889. Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives, 1801-15*, published 1904.

<sup>4</sup> *Napoleon the Gaoler*, by Edward Fraser.

read the narratives of those who escaped (not, even now, all published), or who were released or exchanged—a bare minority. Some accounts did not appear till the end of the war or after; sometimes initials were used instead of names, and a spirit of caution and the effects of repression and terrorism are sometimes to be noted. The others in Verdun were effectively gagged, and no diaries were kept, for obvious reasons. After the first years most letters and many petitions became extinct in some dead-letter office in Paris. English newspapers were forbidden and French papers censored. The arrival of a stray letter or of a new-comer was a welcome event to the whole *dépôt*; it was thus that they heard the news of the battle of Trafalgar. Many persons, interned for ten years or more, knew not if their relatives were alive, if their homes still existed, if their fortunes or bank balances were still preserved intact; still less could they hope for news of world affairs or the state of England. They had also to contend with false and cruel rumours or assertions. In 1809 a blinded sailor was released and he brought back with him a book in which secret messages were written from Verdun.

At first remittances were sent to Verdun from England through French bankers or private sources. Large sums were lost in play and similar or smaller sums secretly paid, it was said, to achieve escapes. The charitable fund raised in England and by *détenus* was distributed as fairly as possible though not without real or imaginary grievances, jealousy and grumbling. *A Picture of Verdun from the Portfolio of a Détenu* appeared anonymously in London in 1810. It was published by James Henry Lawrence after his escape from Orleans in 1809. He was of English puritan descent and was educated at Eton and in Germany. His father, a Jamaican planter, was for some years a *détenu* at Verdun, and later at Bordeaux till 1809. In 1813 a pamphlet appeared called "Dramatic Emancipation or

Strictures on the state of the theatres and the consequent deterioration of the Drama,<sup>1</sup> by James Lawrence, Knight of Malta, etc." This paper is fresh and rewarding to read; and Lawrence deserves to be remembered as a fighter for better conditions on the stage, for the most authentic account of Verdun from 1803-7, and for some witty verses.

The fury of the older Englishmen can easily be imagined when they were reduced to the condition of boys attending early school every day, but with the cold prospect of a dungeon and chains if that fury were not duly repressed. Their first impulse was to establish clubs where they could meet without fear of spies. The clubs varied in expensiveness. The Café Caron, best provided with books, maps, gazettes and pamphlets, and the most difficult to enter, was closed in 1807. At another short-lived club there was the highest play, and, for a time, a first-rate cook from Paris. One club in the old Bishop's Palace was used by bachelors, and married men could take their wives and daughters there. Wine was cheap and good and was served with tea and coffee at the clubs. The comfort of light, and a roaring fire in winter, friendly company and some English books, could be shared by some who had to stumble home in the dark and go to bed in the cold by the glimmer of a cherished candle-end.

But in the early days the game of hazard was introduced at the clubs; and Wirion threatened to destroy all peace and security by sending in *gendarmes* to suppress the play. Meanwhile a "set of black-legs" arrived from Paris and set up a Bank of *rouge et noir*, open day and night, either in a room at the playhouse or in a large saloon at Thierry's coffee-house, later in a private house. A notice proclaimed that the Bank was kept open for the English, the French being forbidden to play. In this house, Lawrence relates,

<sup>1</sup> From the *Pamphleteer*, Vol. 2, 1813.

scenes took place "that would call for the pencil of a Hogarth." It was kept by a villain named Balbi; and General Wirion was his confederate and shared the spoils. Englishmen were forbidden to play at their own houses "for then the General would not have any profit from their losings."

In 1806, the edict to prohibit games of hazard throughout the French Empire being renewed, the house was closed. As a gambling hell and centre of dissipation this club, mentioned in accounts of Verdun, appears to have beggared description. Lieutenant James escaped from Verdun in 1807, and says that when he returned there in 1810 the gambling houses were done away with, and that the "French black-legs" had returned to Paris.

Lord Yarmouth and other Englishmen, and French officers in the garrison, inaugurated horse-racing and hunting of a limited kind; there was cock-fighting and occasional excursions were permitted into the forests where the wild animals provided sport.

The presence of wealthy Englishmen, baulked of their Grand Tours, soon produced a travesty of costly London shops, where every luxury could be purchased, and where both French and exiled English tradespeople made their fortunes by charging in "Bond or 'Bon'" Street exorbitant prices for food and merchandise.

But the anxious crowd of *détenus* was not composed of one class alone; they were of many callings. There were doctors and ships' surgeons, several of whom attended both English and French patients, and were honoured and respected by rich and poor. There were scholars, men of science and of letters, lawyers, clergymen, teachers, actors, business men, as well as tradespeople, craftsmen and sempstresses. Prisoners of war included officers of the Army and Navy, master mariners, and some seamen from the rougher *dépôts* who were given leave to live at



Verdun as gentlemen's servants: a blessed exchange for the men, a boon for their masters.

According to Lawrence there were black sheep among the flock: "Bankrupts, smugglers, and swindlers who had cheated the government, who had escaped the pillory and had brought their ears with them to the Continent."<sup>1</sup> The consequent association was not pleasant for either party. The one felt responsible for misconduct of the other, who were forced to live with countrymen acquainted with their past, instead of possibly reforming among strangers.

At the Club in the old Bishop's Palace there was a ball or assembly once a week with late London hours, "when the gentlemen put buckles in their shoes and all the opera hats were taken out of the trunks." A certain Mr. Lucius Concannon was said to be the life and soul of all the gaiety and fun, and chief organiser of the English theatricals. "His house was a greenroom, where the parts were distributed, the wardrobes arranged, the rehearsals performed and the prologue recited. His own performance of the Irish priest in 'Beaux' Stratagem' was the favourite of the house, and all critics agreed that the part had never been acted so well either at Old Drury or even in Smock Alley." Here are some lines by Lawrence, recited on this very occasion:

And you, young rake, who thoughtless light and gay,  
Contrive to turn the night into the day,  
And drink, and game and gallop life away,  
You, whom no counsel teaches to retrench,  
You, who in France, learn ev'rything but French,  
Take from our play a hint, and who'd refuse  
A wholesome lesson from an ancient muse? <sup>2</sup>

The proceeds of plays were given to charity; most of the people in Verdun remembered and helped the poor.

<sup>1</sup> *A Picture of Verdun*, Vol. 1, pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 241.

Shivering and famished foreign soldiers were also fed and helped during the first years, till they were ordered to pass outside, and not through the city.

The lovers of drama were very fortunate in having at Verdun a keen dramatic critic, himself a literary man, and also a real enthusiast as actor and manager. It is known that the task of allotting parts and soothing and restraining the swollen vanity or vaulting ambitions of amateur actors is no sinecure.

One outstanding *fête* was given by Mr. and Mrs. Concannon to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Wales, 12th August 1805. One hundred and twenty persons met at tea, and the play and epilogue occupied the time till twelve; when supper was served in three rooms, with all the luxuries the season could produce and the most renowned wines in France. The ballroom was ready at two o'clock and dancing went on till six a.m. Breakfast was served at six, tea and coffee till seven, when all retired to bed—to be up, however, by two o'clock to go to the races. The ladies wore white and silver muslins embroidered with flowers. Almost every headdress consisted of three ostrich feathers (the Prince's crest) and the style exceeded that of Mrs. Concannon's great routs in London.

A dim stale odour of dead routs and forgotten scandals clings to the ancient pages of *A Picture of Verdun*, and it contains cruel tales of oppression, extortion and blackmail on the part of Wirion, whose name was loathed. Much of this is carefully confirmed (at great length) by Charles Sturt, M.P., Bridport (afterwards Lord Alington), in his *Real State of France in 1809*. He had been in the navy as a youth before he inherited the family estates in Dorsetshire. Lawrence states that Mr. Sturt sent the Duke of Clarence a list from France comparing the state of the British and French navies. He was imprisoned in the Temple in Paris and afterwards at Verdun. He was sent to Bitche

in 1807 and finally escaped from Meaux in 1809. His nephew was the distinguished explorer.<sup>1</sup>

In an appendix to his *Narrative* Seacome Ellison quotes the published evidence of a former "acting agent" and confidant of Wirion's, Antony Latreille. The *Narrative* of Edward Boys written in 1810 and first published in 1827 has already been given. But it also contains what is evidently a matured and business-like estimate of the extortions of Wirion, calculated "from what was made public." This document, the total sum of which amounted to over £20,000, was submitted to Captain Brenton, who considered it "under the mark"; Ellison quotes it in his appendix, with a word of praise for the *Narrative* of "his friend Captain Boys," as "detailing as much if not more cool courage, determined perseverance and severe suffering as any narrated under similar circumstances."

In 1810 a free Englishman visited Verdun, and a detailed description of the place might have been expected from him. But Mr. George Cotford Call was in a peculiar position. He travelled with a special passport from Napoleon himself and wrote with reserve about the captives. But he did say that in the event of an exchange "many a lad will find his body mortgaged for his debts." He found the prisoners well treated, as indeed they were after Courcelles had left the place; but he adds that "a battalion of midshipmen by no means conduces to the harmony of society."<sup>2</sup>

Wirion (so long dead, and justly, by his own hand) could be pleasant and friendly to some prisoners; but this did not temper his false and cruel disposition to the rest; and he had too much power over "his sheep," as he called them. He was succeeded by Colonel Courcelles, who

<sup>1</sup> Charles Sturt, Governor of New South Wales, Colonial Secretary, etc., *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia*, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. W. Call, article in *Westminster Review*, 1890, July-December, pp. 396-414.

was subsequently dismissed from the Army. Lord Blayney thought him "as great a villain as Wirion" and says he treated the midshipmen with brutal inhumanity just as Wirion had the master mariners. But it was a petition from the midshipmen, written under intolerable persecution, that led to the final downfall of Courcelles under the new Minister of War, General Clarke, Duc de Feltre. Even in 1811 Lord Blayney notes the enormous prices and luxurious food demanded at Verdun. He says the place was full of money-lenders; "on personal security of a hundred per cent. it was by no means difficult to raise the wind, and hence in many cases there was but little difference in the style of living of the *détenus* of the first fortune and the midshipmen of the navy and the bankrupt blacklegs."

The gravest hardship, and one that caused untold suffering as well as constant and anxious apprehension, was the system adopted by Wirion of arrests without any notice or explanation. They generally took place at night, when the victims had no chance to arrange their affairs, notify their departure to friends, borrow money if necessary, or even pack up personal belongings. Mr. Forbes refers to this abuse in a letter he prints in his book on Verdun. He describes cases of captives having to quit their beds at two in the morning, and set off for Bitche under grim conditions. One party of twenty-eight gentlemen were roused on a dark morning in December and ordered to march to Bitche. One of these gentlemen, who had been out all night, was forced to begin the hundred and fifty mile walk in silk stockings and dress shoes. Such a march occupied about ten days. The prisoners were allowed bread and the usual three sous a day, and slept, as has been narrated, on straw, in common jails at night.

In some cases at any rate, *détenus* were given the alternative of travelling in a carriage with the two *gendarmes*,

But the expenses, including board and lodging, were always heavy. Sir John Morshead is said to have paid £80 during his journey from Tours to Bitche. When Lord and Lady Tweeddale in 1803 came from Tours to Verdun, the *gendarmes* insisted upon sitting inside the carriage. This elderly lady died at Verdun in 1804 and her husband two months later.

Mr. Lawrence relates the following incident: "A young Englishman whose name was on the list not being found at his lodgings, the *gendarmes*, who, being professed spies, know the haunts of every one, went and seized him at the *chambre garnie* of Mademoiselle Victoire. The poor fellow had not a sou in his pocket; but the generous girl insisted upon his taking the only five louis which she had in the world, assuring him that she had received them from *Messieurs les anglais*.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER XXIV

### VERDUN

#### *Part II*

AMONG the hundreds of *détenus* and prisoners of war in Verdun and other *dépôts*, many names have been chronicled, giving the effect of figures in a faint, fast-fading daguerreotype.

The second "particular account" of Verdun is to be found in a work of James Forbes (1749-1819) who had served in the East India Company for nineteen years. He was an Englishman by birth and breeding. He was said to be a careful observer, collector and draughtsman during

<sup>1</sup> *Picture of Verdun*, Vol. 2, p. 166.

his travels; and he became a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was imprisoned in France from 1803 till 1804. After his release he published "*Letters from France*, including a particular account of Verdun and the situation of Captives in that City," in 1806; and his *Oriental Memoirs* in 1813-15 (four volumes).

The *Letters* were written to his sister in England in 1803-4, but evidently with a view to later publication. His only child, Eliza, required "the last polish" to her education; and visits to Switzerland, Italy, Holland, Flanders and France, were indicated as suitable, but they must be accompanied "by the never-ceasing vigil of parental care." The Grand Tour began: Mr. Forbes was detained on parole in Paris by a decree issued by Napoleon the day before he arrived (24th May 1803). "My companions," he says, "behaved like heroines, and their resignation tended to compose my spirits." Next morning he was interviewed by General Junot, the military commandant of Paris, who himself had once passed bitter months of captivity upon an English man-of-war. He took a kindly interest in Mr. Forbes, who on 8th December 1803, was ordered to leave Paris for Verdun. He determined to go alone, but his wife and daughter refused to leave him. The 17th December had closed in rain and darkness when they arrived at the barrier at Verdun and alighted from the carriage to walk to the citadel. They soon settled down in comfortable lodgings. Eliza's "polish" was resumed, and her father says "I procured music, drawing, French and dancing masters for my daughter. The Paris dancing-master demanded a *louis* per lesson; here—the first professor in the place humbly asked only ten sous; the drawing-master having studied six years in Rome expects 15 pence and for music we are to give a shilling per lesson."

One day he thanks his sister for a letter "received un-

opened," and another day he records "no news, no *authentic* intelligence. . . . My personal restrictions," he goes on, "are few: for General Wirion lately excused me from appearing at the Municipality more than once in five days, and has given me permission to walk or ride outside the gates when I please . . . about nine o'clock, after attending the *appel*, we breakfast *à l'anglaise*. My daughter attends to her studies. Her mother looks to her domestic engagements and my hours pass in a succession of reading, writing and drawing. At three my brother joins me in a public promenade . . . we dine together at five, and in the evening are joined by our English acquaintance and a very few French visitors. We are happy in a small selection of the former with whom we can enjoy the feast of reason and the flow of soul. We have here English gentlemen in the navy, army, law, physic and divinity, and very many amiable as well as highly qualified persons among them. A large college hall is commodiously fitted up for church-services." He mentions that General Wirion has sent for comedians from Metz and encourages balls and concerts, and, he is sorry to add, a gaming-table.<sup>1</sup> He speaks of the fear of spies, both French and English.

"After a slight supper we close the day by reading in the best of books." Mr. Forbes describes a subscription pack of hounds kept by the French officers and Englishmen in Verdun, "who hunt at all seasons and afterwards meet at a tavern dinner." This reference to the hunt may be compared with some lines of Lawrence:<sup>2</sup>

With a shrug the gay Frenchmen behold the young buck  
Now fighting a cock, and now hunting a duck;  
And in praise of his bull-dog he talks with such fire  
They know not which animal most to admire.

<sup>1</sup> Wirion took a heavy toll in taxes on all public entertainments.

<sup>2</sup> *Picture of Verdun*, Vol 1, p 88

But the chace now begins—see the broken-down hacks  
Advance with the tally-ho Club on their backs,  
Condemned like mere school boys to hunt within bounds  
For a fox a dried herring and curs for their hounds.

What he describes as “a long and churlish winter” seems to have left its colour on his pen. But, if his letters are gloomy, those of Eliza (which he appears to have read), are, he says, “written with a liveliness and gaiety suitable to her years, and give an account of the clubs, dances and other innocent recreations of which she partakes in company with 10 or 12 of the English ladies who move in the upper circle of captivity.” He throws little light upon the actual life of the place, and perhaps his most valued friend was General Wirion, from whom he received indulgence and favours.

Mr. Forbes was released in 1804, a letter from Sir Joseph Banks in his favour being presented to Napoleon by the National Institution of France. He says, “Thus captivity, which curtailed my liberty, enlarged my reputation.” True, he has to leave a loved brother behind, and he has a fleeting regret that Eliza should be deprived of five excellent masters.

The publication of this book caused genuine surprise and indignation among the other prisoners and *détenus* at Verdun. The tempered account of the conditions and the friendship of the author with the hated tyrant Wirion passed their comprehension. They could only explain the attitude of Mr. Forbes by the fact that his brother remained a prisoner in France and that the language in the book was guarded on his account.

Of Eliza, her father wrote while still at Verdun: “It is now my principal aim to give that finish to her education which may enable her rationally to amuse the many solitary hours necessarily attached to the female life. She



has early entered into the vicissitudes of the human journey, and in these revolutionary days no foresight can calculate upon the thorns or roses of her future path." Her father little thought that Eliza was to marry a Frenchman, an *émigré* whom she met in London five years after she left Verdun. He was Marc-René, Marquis de Montalembert, well-known as a military engineer and a soldier. Thus Mr. Forbes became the grandfather of Charles Forbes René, Comte de Montalembert, who was to be distinguished as a writer and publicist,<sup>1</sup> an undaunted fighter for his convictions, and a golden orator. He was born in London in 1810. Eliza<sup>2</sup> died in England.

Another *détenu*, Captain Molyneux Shuldham, R.N., occupied himself between 1804 and 1809 with inventions. Englishmen had been forbidden to sail or row on the Meuse because "they frightened the fish." Thereupon Captain Shuldham set himself the task of designing and constructing two land sailing-boats, the first with one mast, and the second a schooner. They certainly frightened pedestrians and horses and were likewise outlawed. He next produced an ice-sailing boat, and became famous as the inventor of the "revolving keel," or centre-board.<sup>3</sup>

"Mr. Storer of Jamaica" and his tutor, the Rev. William Gorden<sup>4</sup> were arrested at Lyons and ordered to Verdun. They travelled in their own chaise, under the escort of a *gendarme*. Young Mr. Storer pretended to be tempted by the fine weather and proposed that the *gendarme* should exchange his horse for a seat in the carriage. He did so, and presently Mr. Storer rode off and made his escape, leaving his companion to continue his route with the

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Oliphant, *Memoir of Count de Montalembert*. A chapter on recent French history, 1872, Vol. 1, p. 17. Vol. 2, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Her maiden name is given as Élise Rosée Forbes. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edit., Vol. 18, p. 751.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sailing Boat*, Henry Coleman Folkhard, 1901, p. 352, 5th edit.

<sup>4</sup> Name spelt Gorden, also Jorden.

*gendarme*. "Upon their arrival at Verdun," says Lawrence, "Mr. Storer's carriage and wardrobe were sold by public auction for the benefit of the Grand Nation."

Mr. Gorden remained in Verdun till 1814. He became the chairman and treasurer of the committee for dispensing the funds for relief of poor prisoners. This fund was originally started in Verdun with small subscriptions, and was afterwards augmented by large donations from British subscribers. Expenses of schools and dispensaries were paid for in Verdun and other *dépôts*, and remittances made to English gentlemen, resident at various places in France, for relief of prisoners on march. This was a most arduous task, for which Gorden was particularly fitted. He devoted himself to this work, and was always ready to use his influence and persuasion with Wirion in difficult cases. His disposition was kindly and active. He was assisted by Mr. Sevrigh, "an agent for His Majesty's packets in Holland." This gentleman was among the prisoners liberated at Givet after Napoleon's visit there. Mr. Gorden, who was twenty-five years old when he arrived at Verdun, assisted in the religious services. He is highly commended by Lord Blayney. Mr. Wolfe says, before leaving Givet: "As he mixed more in Society than I had ever done, I hoped they might be induced to join the congregation more generally, if he took charge of it."

Mr. Wolfe founded the excellent school for boys and youths which, under Wirion's rule, was closed by the authorities but was reopened after Courcelles had left Verdun. The senior officers, both naval and military, at all *dépôts* did all in their power to protect and advise unseasoned juniors, and some of their names are recorded in the narratives with gratitude and profound respect. During his short captivity Captain Brenton's fine character was an influence for restraint and self-discipline with a certain type of midshipman. He himself founded a school

for their instruction. The Verdun of the sober and healthy younger naval men and prisoners has already been touched upon.

Lieutenant Barker (captured in the *Hussar*, 1804), while confined to his room with severe indisposition, saw from his window a little child fall into the river. He ran downstairs, flung off his coat, plunged into the stream and saved the child. The whole town and neighbourhood were still talking of this gallant rescue when, some months later, Lieutenant Barker saw a *gendarme* fall into the Meuse. "Stifling," says Lawrence, "the antipathy which every free-born Briton must feel for one of those base minions of oppression, he dived into the water to save his fellow-creature." This second feat caused great excitement. The lieutenant was invited to a banquet at the freemasons' lodge and "fraternally thanked in the name of humanity";<sup>1</sup> the prefect of the department paid him a visit when he came to Verdun; the local newspapers and those of some other departments and even in Paris were full of praise.

Lieutenant Wallis, the friend and companion of the unfortunate Captain Wright, was first lieutenant of the *Vincego* at the time of the capture of that vessel on the French coast.

"On his examination, the severest threats were held out<sup>2</sup> to induce him to incriminate Captain Wright; and although he was not versed in the French language, he was repeatedly threatened with the torture of his ignorance. On the murder [?] of his lamented commander, he was deprived of his parole, and instantly placed in close confinement in a prison at Verdun, situated on the river Maese [Meuse]. After two ineffectual attempts, he at length succeeded in extricating himself from this disagreeable situation. The entrance to his dungeon had two

<sup>1</sup> *Picture of Verdun*, Vol. 1, pp. 101-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Naval Chronicle*, No. 30, 1813, pp. 354 and 396-97.

doors, each with a separate lock, which he was compelled to pass before he could reach the outer wall. By the means of false keys, he was enabled to overcome this difficulty, and scaled the wall of 50 feet in height, with the help of a knotted rope. After experiencing many difficulties, he reached Bruges in safety, and got from thence to Blankenburg, where he obtained a boat, and was taken aboard the *Cornwall*, Captain Owen, and reached Dover.

"He represents provisions of all kinds are exceedingly cheap. The generality of the English prisoners at Verdun were well, but from the cheapness of spirits, of a very inferior quality, many of the seamen had severely suffered."

Lieutenant Wallis also gave evidence as to the current market prices of food in France. "These he proved to be lower than in England at this time, and the Board raised the allowances of French prisoners in England as a consequence."<sup>1</sup>

The writer in the *Naval Chronicle* here quoted, states that Lieutenant Wallis was to be promoted to the rank of commander, after the usual court-martial had been held in 1813 upon the capture of the *Vincego* in 1803.

In November 1818, Captain Donat Henchy O'Brien, then in command of the sloop *Slaney*, sailed from Rio de Janeiro, with Christopher Tuthill as his first lieutenant. Before touching at Madeira, he says: "We fell in with and exchanged numbers with H.M. sloop *Racoon*. Captain James Wallis, of the *Racoon*, had been my fellow-prisoner at Verdun."

James Kingston Tuckey (1776-1817), Commander, R.N., and explorer, was captured in 1805 by the enemy squadron from Rochfort on the *Calcutta* (Captain Woodriffe) whilst convoying ships. He suffered during his nine years at Verdun from tedious and harassing illness. In his youth he had nearly died of fever in the West Indies. During

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of Dartmoor Prison*, pp. 29-30.

his strenuous and distinguished naval service he was slightly wounded, and his right arm was lamed in a duel. In 1806 he married Miss Margaret Stewart, a *détenue*. She had been captured whilst on a voyage to India to rejoin her father. "In the intervals of sickness, besides the education of his children which was to him a source of pleasure and constant employment, his chief amusements were reading and composition. Severe as his fate was, he possessed a mind of too active and vigorous a turn to allow his spirits to sink under his unmerited misfortunes." He found relief in writing a *Maritime Geography and Statistics* in four volumes, which was published after 1814. In 1810, Mr. Tuckey, with great difficulty, obtained leave for his wife to return to England on a visit, in order to look into his affairs. Upon her return she was landed at Morlaix and, after six weeks, during which her husband made many unsuccessful efforts to get her back to Verdun, she was sent to England.

Among notable *détenues* was Madame d'Arblay or Fanny Burney, authoress of *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, etc. In 1812, when Napoleon was on his way to Moscow, M. D'Arblay succeeded in procuring a passage for his wife and son on a ship bound for America. Their passports actually, though unofficially, included a landing at Dover with some other passengers. He and his mother reached Deal after some adventures and danger. Next day when driving near Canterbury they met Dr. Charles Burney who had been watching for them for three nights. Late that evening "Fanny Burney" saw her father alone in his study and found him aged and failing. He died early in April 1814.

One of the most remarkable *détenus* was Thomas Manning (1772-1840). He was a Chinese scholar of distinction, the first Englishman to visit Lhasa,<sup>1</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Anderson, *The Letters of Thomas Manning to Charles Lamb*, 1925, p. 92, note.

cherished friend of Charles and Mary Lamb. He was honoured by Napoleon, who granted him a passport for China which included a special permit to visit England.

Manning left no formal account of his adventures; but a rough journal, cherished by his family, was lent to Sir Clements Markham and published by him in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

Manning called at St. Helena in 1817 on his way to England. He presented some gifts to Napoleon and thanked him.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most haunting figures is that of a certain Scotsman, because (like the poor lad, a prisoner on Christmas day, in Lord Blayney's *Narrative*), his story has no ending. Mr. Christie, a *détenu*, was said to have a high judicial appointment awaiting him in Ceylon. On the march to Verdun he failed in a first attempt at escape. He afterwards succeeded in descending the ramparts but was retaken on the road beyond Metz. The *gendarmes* took him back to Verdun by *diligence*. While horses were being changed Mr. Christie again "took to his heels" but was recaptured. After some days spent in the Citadel of Verdun he was ordered off to Bitche and on that journey a *gendarme* had orders to share his bed. At Bitche he made attempts at escape, but after a rope ladder had been found in his trunk he was confined with the seamen in the *souterrain*.

Here "he was the soul of every plot among the most daring spirits . . . he was never dejected; he yielded in resolution to none of the bravest sailors who had fought for the honour of the British flag, nor to any of the most desperate smugglers who had proved the terror of the custom-house officers; and he breathed without murmuring the same infected air with some of the most infamous

<sup>1</sup> Sir C. Markham, *Narrative of the mission of G. Bogle to Tibet and Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*, 1876, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> O'Meara, B.E., *Napoleon at St. Helena*, 1888, Vol 2, pp. 128-31.

scoundrels that could have disgraced the Newgate Calendar." His efforts at escape, however, were frustrated by his being placed in a solitary cell. He was moved from one prison to another. In 1807 he was at Nancy. Here a passing *détenu* heard the French themselves declaim against the barbarity of confining "a traveller" with felons and malefactors. "There being no court-yard in the jail, Mr. Christie used for exercise to run up and down stairs so many times a day. He had then been confined more than three years; nor have I ever heard of his being released." So there we have to leave him, heroic, and cruelly unfortunate.<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence describes his own escape after he and his father had leave to reside in Tours in 1807. In order not to compromise his father in any way, he got himself removed to Orleans in 1808. His plans were cleverly contrived, and executed with boldness and good humour. Some years before, he says, Napoleon "gave a blunt refusal to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, who requested that the Chevalier Lawrence, who had constantly resided in Germany, might be permitted to return to his court." But his knowledge of French and German, and the dramatic instinct which helped him with disguises, caused his "long peregrination to be a pleasure as soon as he had crossed the Rhine," and the first acute stages of anxiety and danger were past. He also describes the escape of his father, the elderly Jamaica planter.

"Determined," Lawrence writes of his father, "to avoid the reproaches which, however unmerited, an affectionate father might make to himself had they been retaken together and suffered the penalty of evasion, he had constantly declined the proposition of escaping with his son. But no sooner had he heard the account of his son's success then he determined to follow his example. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, *Picture of Verdun*, Vol 2, pp 130-33.

At length, in the disguise of a German sailor, he embarked on board a German vessel, which having put into Plymouth, he to the surprise of his messmates with whom he had worked and fared alike during the passage, declared that he was an Englishman, and insisted upon going ashore with the pilot. Though of shorter duration his escape was more laborious than that of his son." Lawrence is said to have led a roving life (after his escape) upon the Continent.<sup>1</sup>

In June 1806 Lord Yarmouth was released, and also Lord Elgin (from Orleans) and General Abercrombie and Captain Leveson-Gower. The young Duke of Newcastle who had left Eton for France lost, like other youths of his age, the most fruitful years of his education in captivity. He was released in 1807. Mr Concannon received a passport for Vienna in 1806, and, after his return to England became member of Parliament for Coventry.

Here is part of an epilogue written by the Chevalier Lawrence.

His audience is long dispersed, but it may serve for an epitaph for some of the pioneers among Napoleon's prisoners and *détenus*.

The French behold you now with admiration,  
And cry, "Is this the hum-drum jog-trot nation?"  
The *émigrés* have much improved John Bull,  
The animal, we find, is not so dull.  
If, in the morning, he be somewhat gruff,  
He's after dinner amiable enough;  
We'll teach him dancing, he shall teach us drinking,  
And we've the same antipathy to thinking,  
And should his soul e'er leave him in the lurch,  
And take its flight where no gendarme can search,  
Over his bones no wicked wit will say,  
"*Cy git, Jean Bull, Anglais, et Ecuyer,*  
*Qui se pendit, pour se desennuyer.*"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, *Picture of Verdun*, Vol. 2, pp. 190-213.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 110-11.



## CHAPTER XXV

### VERDUN

#### *Part III*

MAJOR-GENERAL LORD BLAYNEY,<sup>1</sup> an Irish peer, wrote a fascinating narrative<sup>2</sup> of his journey on *parole* from Spain to Verdun. He was captured during the siege of Cadiz. This journey, taken on horseback with his servants or in a carriage, is in amazing contrast to those of his fellow-prisoners. He describes scenery, museums, libraries and picture galleries, with special interest in the various kinds of food and wines of the countries he passed through. He travelled without restraint, attending routs and concerts on his way, with little real inconvenience or anxiety. After reaching Paris, however, (as once previously) he was placed under strict guard until he reached Verdun in April 1811. Some months after Lord Blayney's arrival at Verdun in April 1811 Colonel Courcelles was replaced as commandant of Verdun by the Baron de Beauchêne. Under his humane rule conditions were relaxed and much improved. He "immediately renounced all secret police, spies and informers; broke up the establishment in the Citadel, restored all to parole, and granted permission to many to reside in the country. These changes helped to put an end to desertion. A Council of Administration was set up, consisting of three French and two English

<sup>1</sup> He served under the Duke of York in Flanders, 1794-95; was lieutenant-colonel of 89th regiment in Ireland, 1798; assisted in reduction of Malta; major-general in Peninsula, 1810, captured at Malaga; imprisoned in France, 1810-14; lieutenant-general in 1819. His book was published in 1814. — *D.N.B.*

<sup>2</sup> *Narrative of a Forced Journey through Spain and France; as a Prisoner of War in the years 1810-14.* 1814.

officers for the purpose of inquiring into complaints, but under the Baron de Beauchêne, who was the very fountain of justice and equity, it proved of very little use."

Lord Blayney, being senior Army officer, inquired as soon as possible into the state of the soldiers confined in various *dépôts*. He found the conditions very distressing and the men in urgent need of extra food and clothing. He pointed out that the pay of these men was placed in due course to their credit . . . and that the men had the right to claim and receive it from the British Government. The reply was that each man was to be given "the moiety of his pay to purchase tobacco and comforts, six sous a day with perhaps an additional shirt and a pair of shoes. As a result, these poor fellows have since enjoyed comforts they never knew before."

Lord Blayney drove about the country and visited *dépôts* where the British soldiers were imprisoned. His account of the fortress of Sedan is of sinister interest. "It was celebrated" he says, "as a prison for English who had attempted escape from other prisons. Nothing could be more formidable for those poor fellows . . . the extensive covered ways, steep, and cut through solid rock. Each [man] had a cell and no communication was permitted. The prison doors were double and secured with bars in all directions. There was a wall (if escape was made from the cell) to descend, at the lowest part about 160 feet deep. Then a climb over prodigious rocks and walls formed of immense heights, surrounded by sentinels at short and convenient intervals. . . . I have seen and known many common soldiers and sailors who have escaped from these prisons, without even the assistance of money to clear a passage; and almost all of whom, after having surmounted their difficulties and obtained the summit of their wishes, unfortunately committed themselves by some act of intemperance and folly."

The prisoners at Sarrelibre are described as "mostly vagabonds who had entered the French service and been sent back on account of their unruly and turbulent characters." Those two prisons, with Bitche, are described as punishment *dépôts*.

Lord Blayney seems to have found life at Verdun boring; "the destruction of each other's characters indeed formed the chief occupation of many of our Countrymen. . . . In order," he says, "to enliven the sameness and ennui which pervaded the *dépôt* our races were established . . . which took place once a fortnight and were attended by first families of the department. . . . I had several horses on the turf there myself and I ran them for large sums with varying success, winning considerably at first, but leaving a loser." He relates that "wishing to return the attentions of the Prefect of Metz, I invited him and his family to a dinner, at which 110 of my Countrymen with several French were entertained to their entire satisfaction." This gesture to restore the former gaiety of Verdun was apparently not repeated. Those were sober times and most captives were poor and many in debt.

In March 1813 the Baron de Beauchêne died. His loss was deeply felt and mourned by all the British, everyone of whom attended his funeral. He was succeeded in the command by Major de Meulan, said to be a gallant soldier, honourable, just and generous. Under his benevolent rule, Lord Blayney lived in a cottage and drove about the country with delighted and observant eyes.

At last, early in January 1814, more than three months after the battle of Leipzig, the retreat of the French armies began to fill the streets of Verdun with shivering, starving refugees in flight from Metz, Nancy, and other places. Day and night the grinding noise of heavy traffic was heard, as an endless procession of pieces of artillery and loaded waggons was followed by small detachments of

cavalry, both horses and men worn out with sickness, fatigue and famine.

There is a description by Langton<sup>1</sup> of the arrival of the wounded in rude carts and waggons filled with straw. The French and English doctors tended, and the stricken inhabitants of Verdun fed these unfortunates, many of whom were dying. Numbers of the carts conveying the dead at midnight to a field beyond the ramparts passed "with a hollow and melancholy sound at those lonely hours," underneath his windows.

In the midst of this confusion, all prisoners and *détenus* were ordered to leave Verdun immediately. Among the crowds there, hopes of release had faded; new dreams for the future were strangely mingled with dread and anxiety.

Captain Boys gives a short account, which he must have had from an eye-witness. "During the three days given for the accomplishment of this order, scenes of confusion occurred never before witnessed in Verdun. Eleven hundred prisoners of all ranks, rejoicing and exulting in the move, of whom one hundred had families, two hundred, from age and infirmity, together with five hundred children, needing carriages, and few horses to be procured. About three hundred young women claiming, by the ties of affection, the right of emigration; tumultuous assemblages in almost every street, Jews and tradesmen bustling from house to house for payment of debts, when by far the greater number of prisoners were almost penniless. The Military chest exhausted and unreplaceable from the rapidly approaching theatre of war. Major de Meulan gone to Blois, thence no commanding officer, no arrangements, no subordination, and the feeble French authorities in hourly dread of the English taking possession of the place. . . . Vehicles and draught quadrupeds of every description were put in requisition, and congregated

<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of a captivity in France*, Richard Langton, 1836.

masses of youth and age, of vigour and infirmity, moved off in dense confusion, affording a faint idea of Israel's retreat from the Land of Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

Two letters from a Scots lieutenant who took part in this rout were printed in the *Naval Chronicle* and dated Blois, 17th February 1814.<sup>2</sup>

. . . You are no doubt informed of the removal of the *dépôt* from Verdun. No more than twenty-four hours' notice was given; and knowing as you do, the situation of too many of us, in arrears for lodgings and in debt in every quarter of the town, you will be better able to conceive that I am to describe the clamours, reproaches, uproar and confusion that took place. Many were forced to leave their goods and baggage behind them: and others, with their wives and numerous families, in the midst of winter, were compelled to undertake a dreary journey, over bad cross-country roads, ill provided with raiment, money or conveyances. The miseries of war in an invaded country extend far beyond its actual theatre, and Verdun has already experienced some portion of its sorrows. . . . We set off by detachments, in every possible mode; but were obliged to go a proscribed road, and to reach this at a given time: during our march we experienced all the rigours that extreme cold and bad weather could produce. We were billeted upon the inhabitants of the places where we halted; but, I am sorry to say, in general, we were very badly lodged. However, all things considered, I got over it tolerably well. I left Verdun with no more than twenty-one francs, out of which, and the marching money, I not only contrived to meet the expenses of the journey to Blois, but also to buy me a new pair of shoes. I walked the whole way, and acquitted myself much to my satisfaction.

. . . In short, Orleans was by far the cleanest and hand-somest city through which we passed. I remained in this city three nights. I breakfasted, dined, and spent much of my time with Mr. Thompson and his family (M.P. for Evesham,

<sup>1</sup> Captain Boys, *Narrative*, 4th edition, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> *Naval Chronicle*, Vol. 31, 1814, pp. 303-10.

1803, detained when travelling with his family). This gentleman displayed a most hospitable mind. He was kind and attentive to all; to many he advanced cash; and entertained as many as his house would accommodate, whilst the *dépôt* was passing; more than twenty sat down at his table to dine. You cannot think how much it cheers one's spirit, after a long and fatiguing march on foot, to partake of his hospitable cheer and sit by his blazing fires of wood. Tomorrow we are to leave *Blois* for *Gueret*, Département de la Creuse, where we are to arrive on the 26th. I have thus eight days march before me. The roads are uncommonly bad, are all cross-country roads, and we shall start without our marching money. The sailors and private soldiers belonging to the *dépôt*, who have preceded us, have suffered dreadfully, poor fellows, being ill clothed, and in want of necessaries of every kind. In short, the whole *dépôt* are hard run; however I hold up, and shall, by fortitude and perseverance, surmount all these trifles. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Lord Blayney, when passing through Orleans in 1811, visited Mr. Thompson (an old companion of scenes of gaiety in London) and his wife. He tells this story of that cheerful household:

"I paid Mrs. Thompson a visit in the afternoon, and was amused by some curious anecdotes of our countrymen whom she had occasion to see passing through Orleans. She had at this time an English sailor in the house, whom she desired might be called in; but Jack was searched for in vain, until the cook demanded if the well had been looked into, for that its bottom was his usual place of retreat? We therefore accompanied her to it, and on her calling, '*allons Jack*' she was immediately answered with a '*holla, here am I*'—'*Come along, Jack,*' said I in a slang sailor's voice, and up came a fine manly looking tar, hand

<sup>1</sup> Sir E. Hain, *Prisoners of War in France*, pp. 36-38.

See too the vivid account of the two Cornish seamen's prolonged and exhausting journey on foot to the coast. They describe the difficulty for local authorities in villages and towns in finding food and billets for the thousands of returning prisoners

over head, by the iron chain from a depth of sixty feet. Seizing me by the hand, and shaking it with Herculean power, 'why then, d—n me,' cried he, 'but I am glad to see a real countryman, for as for these here French people they talk so fast, and plague me so, that I can find no place of rest but the bottom of the well, and there I am sure none of them will venture to follow me.' He then related his story, *as how* he had been wounded and taken in a gunboat; and *as how*, in passing through Orleans in a most miserable plight, Mrs. Thompson had kindly taken him into the house; 'but,' continued he, 'though these people are too civil by half, I would prefer a piece of salt junk and a biscuit with a countryman, to the finest dinner with your French people; for, somehow or other, I don't over and above like their ways'."<sup>1</sup>

Many midshipmen must have trudged all the way from Verdun to a seaport; among them were the future Sir George Back and Rear-Admiral Nepean. The two midshipmen made their way to England from Verdun.

Evan Nepean was captured on H.M.S. *Hussar*, 1804. "Strenuous efforts were made to obtain his release by his uncle and namesake, the distinguished Secretary of the Admiralty and later Lord Commissioner."

George Back (1798-1878) entered the navy as midshipman of the *Arethusa* at the age of ten. He saw Lequeritio batteries (North Spain) destroyed, and was often under fire. He was in 1809 taken prisoner by the French at Debs, while on a cutting-out expedition with the *Arethusa*'s boats.<sup>2</sup> During the exacting marches across the Pyrenees from St. Sebastien (to which the prisoners were sent), the guards allowed George Back to ride in the pannier of a mule because he was so small and light. His grand-nephew, Sir Bernard Pares, writes to me: "The nearest

<sup>1</sup> Lord Blayney, *Narrative*, Vol. 2, pp. 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> *D.N.B.* Vol. 1, s.v.

he got to escape was when the sailors threw him up in a blanket so that he could see over a partition in the prison and tell them what was going on, on the other side." During his five years at Verdun he studied French, mathematics and drawing. In England he was appointed midshipman to the *Alebar* and served on the North American Station.

In 1818, at twenty, he began his famous Arctic experiences in a voyage with Sir John Franklin, and was with him again in a second land expedition in 1827. He became Commander, and in 1833 he was appointed on an expedition to search for Ross. He received the R.G.S. Gold Medal. In 1834 he made another great exploring expedition. He was knighted in 1839; and in 1857 he became an Admiral and was given a D.C.L. and became a Fellow of the Royal Society. Mr. A. H. Beesly writes of him that "of all these honours he was indeed worthy, for in bravery, intelligence, and love of adventure he was the very model of an English Sailor."<sup>1</sup>

Lieutenant Tuckey was obliged to travel alone with his two little boys, his wife having had to be in England since 1810: "I had indeed," says the father, "a hard trial with my little boy, for after attending him night and day for three weeks (he had no mother, no servant, no friend but me to watch over him) I received his last breath and then had not only to direct his interment, but also to follow him to the grave and recommend his innocent soul to his God; this was indeed a severe trial but it was *a duty*, and I did not shrink from it."

In August 1814, Lieutenant Tuckey was promoted by Lord Melville to the rank of Commander. In 1815 he applied to be appointed to the Expedition to explore the River Zaire. There was a doubt about his health, but the Lords of the Admiralty finally appointed him to the

<sup>1</sup> *D.N.B.* Vol. 1, s.v.



command of what proved to be a tragic and most disastrous expedition.

Captain Tuckey died (1816) at sea, of exhaustion after a fever, and so did six other members of the expedition, and ten of the crew of the second ship. Among the dead scientists was Lieutenant Hawkey, who had been eleven years at Verdun.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE LAST

THE reception of the news of the Peace may be imagined by readers who lived through the end of the Boer War or of the Great War. Lord Blayney, in a country house he had acquired some miles from Gueret, while drinking wine with friends after dinner was interrupted by a dramatic and violent rapping at the door. An express had arrived with the great news of the fall of Paris. He brought forth the best his cellar could produce. The English seamen and soldiers "were elated to madness next day," while penniless prisoners were marching through the town "with a light heart and cheerful disposition" to the nearest harbour, Bordeaux. "It was my duty," says Lord Blayney, "to supply them [the soldiers] with money and shoes as far as I could procure them . . . but they mostly drank the money and sold the shoes . . . then the windows suffered severely, scarcely a pane of glass remaining unbroken in the town of Gueret."

<sup>1</sup> Narrative of an expedition to explore the River Zaire, usually called the Congo, in S. Africa in 1816 under the direction of Captain J. K. Tuckey, R.N., etc., published by permission of the Lords of the Admiralty. London, 1818. See Preface to Expedition.

An account of the fall of Paris is given in the journal of a *détenu*, who had remained on parole in Paris from 1802 till 1814. This was Mr. T. Underwood, draftsman of the Society of Antiquaries. His journal, published in London in 1828, does not even mention his name, such were the precautions of the time. Parts of his MS. had appeared anonymously in a London magazine in 1825 and also in the *Revue Britannique* for 1826. It was praised in the *Etoile* and *Courier Français*.

"Mr. Underwood had permission to remain in Paris as a special favour, through his intimacy with some of the *savants* of Paris; he also enjoyed friendly and familiar intercourse with many eminent persons in the French capital. He was honoured with frequent interviews with the Empress Joséphine in her domestic and private station. When the English *détenus* were warned to leave Paris on January 28, 1814, at the particular request of the Empress Joséphine, Mr. Underwood was among many that were allowed to remain."

His writing is restrained and impressive, and a touch of austerity is given to the scene he describes by the cold light of an early spring morning.

". . . Mr. L. called and we walked . . . a heavy cannonade was heard to the North-east, apparently very near us. A few people had collected in this field (behind the hospital of St. Louis) and amongst them I observed a hawker crying bread and brandy, '*Prenez la goutte cassez la croûte*' with as much unconcern as at a fair. . . . March 31. A fine morning; Mr. T. a fellow-*détenu* called upon me at half past six. We walked to the *Barrière Mont Martre*, which we found shut, and proceeded thence to the *Barrière des Martyres*, which was open, with national guards posted at the entrance. Passing through, we found the allied army; and feeling ourselves under their protection, considered our detention of eleven years to be at length terminated.

Near the barrier, a Russian band of music was playing, and a group, composed of a few French of both sexes, and some soldiers of the allies were quietly listening to it. Close to this, several horses killed in the battle were lying, upon which some of the listeners were seated. We walked up *Mont Martre*: the streets were filled with Russian, Prussian and German soldiery, forming part of the Silesian Army, but mostly Russians; some sleeping, some bedecking themselves, others shaving their comrades or waxing their moustaches. . . . A dead body, half-stripped, was lying by the side of the old road . . . probably that of the last Frenchman killed yesterday on his flight to Paris. The vast old gypsum quarry on the left of the road was full of soldiers sleeping among piles of arms. The summit of the mountain was covered with troops, and on every part were the remains of watch-fires, made with vine-props, and surrounded with empty bottles. We were struck with the mild physiognomy of the Russians. No one paid any attention to us, although we were the only persons who ventured so far among them. Never was any assemblage of men gazed on by me with greater interest. I felt indebted to them for my deliverance from captivity; they had revenged their country and raised the Continent of Europe from the degraded state to which it had been subjected for so many years. These troops a few hours before had been the furious and terrible agents of destruction; but of this not the smallest vestige was now apparent in their manners, nor was there the least appearance of exultation from victory." On 3rd April however, Underwood describes a Cossack camp as "a confused horde of barbarians," and says "time seemed to have rolled back, and another age, as well as another state of society, and another people were displayed." On 11th April he writes: "After the resolution of the Government *pro tempore*, which authorised all the conscripts, and the newly

raised battalions, and those composing the *levée en masse*, to return home, numbers of emaciated lads were seen daily crawling into Paris, and lying extended in the streets, many labouring under nervous fever the results of grief and fear, which on their return home, soon left them.”<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon’s treatment of the Continental soldiers taken prisoners in his wars is described as savage and ruthless beyond words.<sup>2</sup> Ellison said that the Austrian and Prussian prisoners were treated worse than either the English or the conscripts; and were often stripped when taken . . . numbers of them passed through Verdun, where the officers were generally invited by the English to a good dinner; and in one instance Lord Y—— sent each of the men thirty sous, intelligence of which soon reached Paris, when orders came to admit no more within the gates; and whenever any of them halted in the suburbs the *détenus* were forbidden to go out.<sup>3</sup>

Though the English captives heard no official news of the war, they saw, during their forced marches or in different prisons, parties of recruits and also of deserters. The fate of deserters was always desperate: when retaken they were marched to Toulon, imprisoned, and then generally sent to the colonies, where climatic conditions were deadly. “*Si on m’embarque, comme je le présume, ce sera fait de moi,*” writes one poor fellow.<sup>4</sup>

Many were killed in battle or captured by the English and sent to the dreaded “pontons de Plymouth.” If a deserter succeeded in escaping he led an uneasy and

<sup>1</sup> [Underwood, T.] “A Narrative of memorable events in Paris, preceding the Capitulation and during the occupancy of that city by the allied armies in the year 1814, being extracts from the *Journal of a Détenu*, etc., etc. London 1828. Edited by J. Britton, F.S.A., M.R.S.L., author of works on architectural antiquities.”

<sup>2</sup> Fraser, Edward, *Napoleon the Gaoler*, Chap. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ellison, *Narrative*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> *Lettres de Grognauds*, 1936, p. 74, p. 247. *Les Prisonniers en Grande-Bretagne*, chapter 7, pp. 243-61.

haunted life at the best. That the country people in France felt deep pity for the recruits and also for deserters is proved by the generous kindness shown to English escaped prisoners. While wars were planned and fought, of which they knew nothing but their own pride in Bonaparte and grief for their sons and lovers, the toiling remnant in the villages, old men, boys and women and girls went on with the work, tilling the earth, tending the vines, rearing the cattle, and producing the "good wheaten bread and cheap pure wines," praised by all who had pence to buy with. These peasants had little of their own to sell or give away; but many strayed and weary conscripts, and often deserters too, were sure of a welcome, food, a hot drink, a seat by the fire, a bed of straw in the barn. And if English escaped prisoners ventured near a farm or cottage, the keen-eyed workers in the dawn or dusk may have taken them for Frenchmen or not (several frankly confessed their position as escaped English prisoners) but memorable kindness was shown and is often recorded in these pages.

In *Lettres de Grognaards*, 1936, MM. Émile Fairon and Henri Heuse have printed a collection of letters from Belgian conscripts and soldiers in Napoleon's armies, from the *département de l'Ourte*. The letters were discovered in the *Dépôt des Archives de l'Etat à Liège*, where they had been deposited by the families of the soldiers in the absence of *certificats de présence*, and in order to serve as such; other letters were lent by families by whom they have been preserved and cherished. The book is beautifully printed and illustrated. Readers who are neither professional scholars nor historians must feel the deep interest (and also the intimate character) of these letters, which have a curious resemblance to others written by English recruits in France a hundred years later. Neither the Belgian nor the English lads could speak French; they saw new places

with bewildered eyes, and suffered, at first, the same unassuaged pangs of homesickness. It is good news when the Belgian soldier writes: "*Je me plais fort bien avec tous les Liégeois, car nous sommes quatre cents presque tous connaissances.*"<sup>1</sup> Or when an Englishman in the Great War writes, "Tell M—— I see Bill; he goes in the same trench as me." The prices of food, drink and tobacco are a constant theme; and, later, from the hungry and penniless soldiers in Napoleon's armies, there are urgent and constant appeals for money. The soldiers all send the same touching messages, ". . . if you write, write quickly as we go in the firing line in a few days . . ." but the parents in Belgium are implored to pray for their son or have masses said for his soul, "*car la prière est courte chez nous*"<sup>2</sup>

The recruits from *L'Ourte* were to fight at Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena, Wagram, in Italy, in Spain, in Holland, in Germany, in Russia, and again in Germany. Throughout this book the expert editorial comment runs, unobtrusive and sympathetic, like a silver cord to hold the faded sheets together.

Some of the letters were written in British prisons. The English *pontons* or hulks were dreaded as much as the French "gallies," and justly so. In letters from prisons in England and Scotland the money asked for from home is very often used to pay for lessons, as well as for tobacco and a taste of spirits. But the bitterest privation is the lack of letters. No home news, in too many cases for years, was to all prisoners of war a cause of dreadful anxiety and depression, filling their hearts with the fear of death or misfortune, or, worse still, with the painful conviction that they themselves were completely forgotten.

But it was not hardship alone that changed men like Choyce, O'Brien and Williams so profoundly. The sailor

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres de Grognauds*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Choyce speaks of his adventures, and of "many hardships when a prisoner to the Spaniards in South America," and likewise of how "I was marched from one end of France to another, chained like a wild beast, and treated worse than ever a bear is that is taken about the country to be baited for the amusement of the People."<sup>1</sup> O'Brien,<sup>2</sup> when he entered the fortress of Bitche chained to the doomed Corsican deserters, was unrecognizable by his closest friends. When the two Cornishmen, Short and Williams, first met officers of the English Dragoons after a ten years' captivity, Williams wrote: "We told them to cut up the *gendarmes* as they had been our greatest enemies. They told us they had done so a few days before and had driven a great many of them into the river."<sup>3</sup> Williams could not forget the ignominy of the chains. The story of his attempted escapes and unbroken courage and endurance with his motto of "never despair" is outstanding. On one of his forced marches after such an experience, the *gendarmes* bade the Englishman beg through the city for supper as other prisoners did. A milkmaid had hastily thrust a glass of brandy and a pair of shoes (alas! too large) into Williams' hands. He drank and "took Dutch Courage" and earned a much needed sixpence up and down the streets. Later he was placed, as an Englishman, in front of a long line of prisoners chained round the neck. After the others were released the chain became jammed and Williams was told to sleep with it round his neck. He "kicked up a loud shindy" and in the end his head was laid on a stone and the chain beaten off with a hammer. Boys and Whitfield finally planned their escape after they had been locked in a dungeon at Valenciennes under the threat of death. Cecil was kept in a dungeon owing to a

<sup>1</sup> Lovett Cameron, *Log of a Jack Tar*, p. 215. (Fisher Unwin.)

<sup>2</sup> O'Brien, *Adventures*, Vol. 2, pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Edward Hain, *Prisoners of War in France*, p. 141.

piece of thoughtless folly in meddling with a little cast of Napoleon on his lodging chimney-piece.

But it should be noted that the desperate conditions in some prisons were due to the absolute power and tyranny of some *one man* of a brutal, bloodthirsty type, and that, upon his removal, life for prisoners at once improved and became humane, as at Quimper and Verdun and Besançon.<sup>1</sup>

In October 1839,<sup>2</sup> a deputation from Verdun arrived in London to claim a debt of £140,000 contracted by *détenus* and prisoners of war. It still remains unpaid.

A last quotation may suitably end this collection. It was written by Benjamin Robert Haydon the painter and sculptor in 1814, while on a visit to Fontainebleau. He describes an evening in Napoleon's *Jardin anglais*.

"When to the soothing tinkle of a gentle fountain . . . I stretched myself out and meditated on Napoleon and his fate till night had darkened without obscuring the scene. . . . The evening was delicious; the poetry of my mind unearthly for the time: when the crash of the Imperial drums, beating with a harsh unity that stamped them as the voices of veterans in war, woke me from my reverie, and made my heart throb. Never did I hear such drums before; there was years of battle and blood in every sound."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Diary of Peter Bussell*, pp. 104-8 (Peter Davies Ltd.).

<sup>2</sup> See Captain Brenton, chapter 6, p. 61. *Napoleon the Gaoler*, by Edward Fraser, p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondence and Table-talk with Memoir*, of B. R. Haydon, 1873. Vol. 2, pp. 303-4.

THE END.





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